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EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

NAUGHTY DOG

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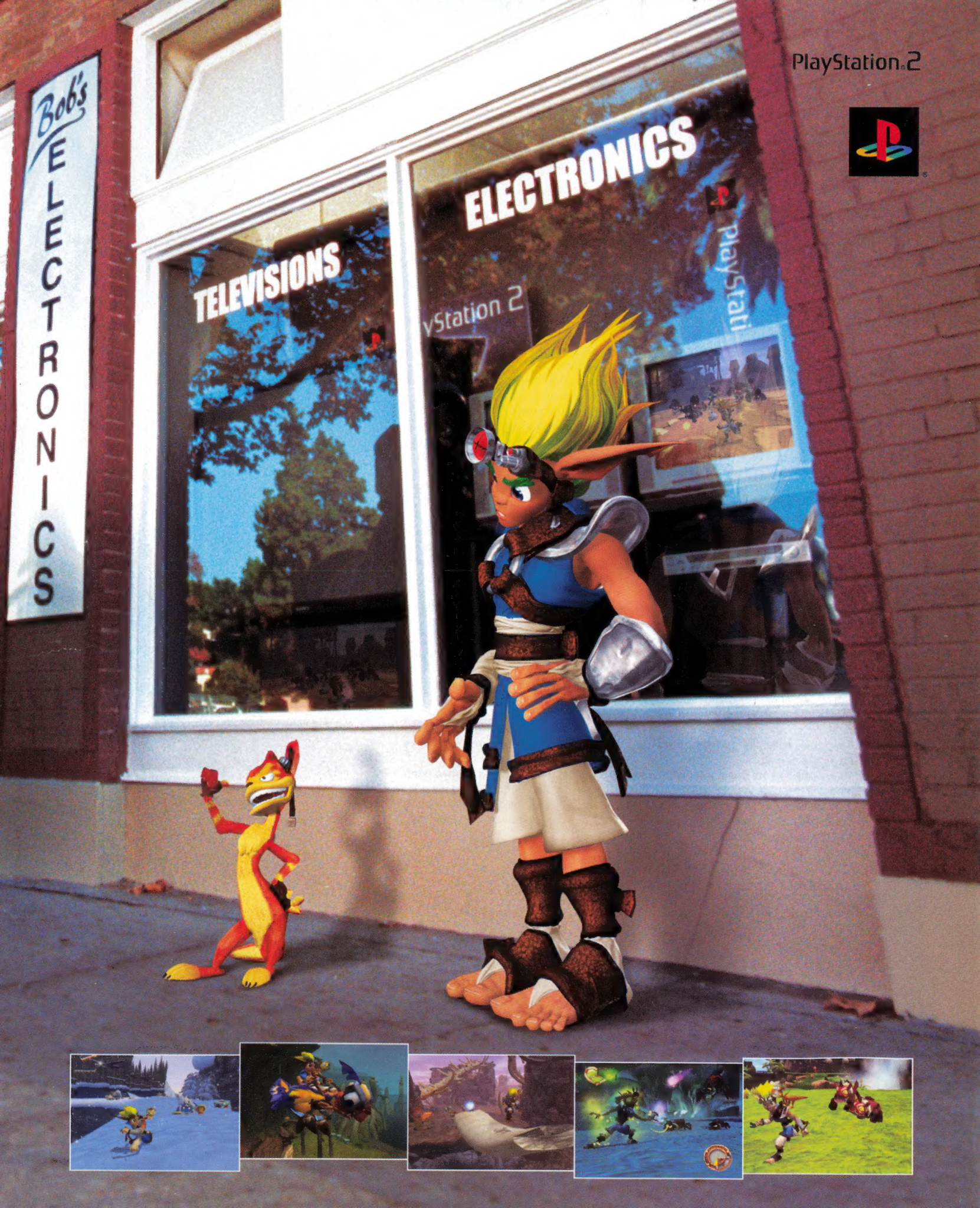
Bob's
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PlayStation 2

play

vol. 1 issue 6

PLAYING NICE

While my editorials are usually more consumer driven, it's E3 time again, so my annual industry rant is now in session. As we burst through the doors of this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, and begin to analyze, praise, and criticize, I think it's important that we take a moment to pay tribute to the effort that goes into creating an original piece of software. Behind every screenshot is a team that had to stop production of their baby and assemble a playable as indicative of the finished product as possible, knowing that for every long load time and lag in frame rate, some bozo is going to let out a sarcastic sigh. We don't stop and think often enough of what game development entails. Assembling and uniting a team of creative (and therefore often-times eccentric) people, pointing them all in the same direction, and then fleshing out either something completely original or otherwise, is a daunting task—a road paved in land mines. Whether you're creating the next big thing or a sports, extreme sports, or skateboarding clone (a fate just short of dinner on *Fear Factor*), the amount of work that goes into making a game is staggering. I mean, how many ways can you hide the letters to spell s.k.a.t.e. before you just dive out the window?

Once a game is headed down the final stretch, the next stop is with us, the press, where things have become increasingly complex. It used to be, not long ago, where we could contact the in-house PR at a given developer and request art, a playable, and some valuable insight, which in turn would equate to major coverage for their game. More often than not, a developer's walls (and sometimes floor) are covered in conceptual art, but gaining access to it has become increasingly difficult. Nowadays, PR is a much tougher prospect. All of the wonderful growth we continue to experience in this industry comes at a price, as gaming becomes increasingly more like the film industry, needing more layers to meet the demands of a larger market segment. With developers and publishers spread so thin trying to get a game made and into mainstream distribution channels, the job of coverage much of the time falls on the shoulders of PR agencies, who must now squeeze enough assets out of their respective (very busy) developers to appease a more demanding and larger press. It is this pairing, between developer and PR, that now determines how well, and how much, a game will be represented in the press. I guess what I'm trying to say is that it takes a lot to build a strong brand these days—teamwork between the developer, publisher, PR, and press—but the catalyst, the bottom line, has always been the quality of the game.

Which brings us back to my original thought. We're old school, so for us, it's always been about connecting with readers who love games as much as we do, and our mutual respect for the teams who provide us with countless hours of virtual magic. It's our ultimate goal to bring you their vision as well as possible through print media. If our intentions were anything but, you'd be holding the wrong magazine.

"WE'RE OLD SCHOOL, SO FOR US, IT'S ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT CONNECTING WITH READERS WHO LOVE GAMES AS MUCH AS WE DO..."

DAVE HALVERSON, EDITOR IN CHIEF

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MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Blood, Violence

PlayStation®2

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jon m gibson
executive editor

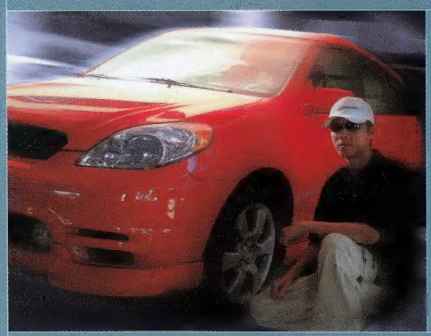
Over the last few month's, Jon has developed quite an unhealthy obsession with the English—the accents, the right-side steering wheels, the pints. But, as chance would have it, there's not one *iced* tea to be found in the entire country—even though *hot* tea is the national beverage. Can't they just put it in the fridge?

brady fiechter
editorial director

Still shaken by the carnage of this year's Oscars, Brady decided to stop supporting Hollywood and move out of LA, but then he changed his mind and moved even closer to the epicenter of the city, where better coffee fostered late-night *Medal of Honor* and *Resident Evil* sessions. Closer to strip clubs, too.

michael hobbs
art director

After spending the majority of this year "getting into it," Michael Hobbs will now relax and spend some quality time "getting out of it."



chin "nelson" lui
associate art director

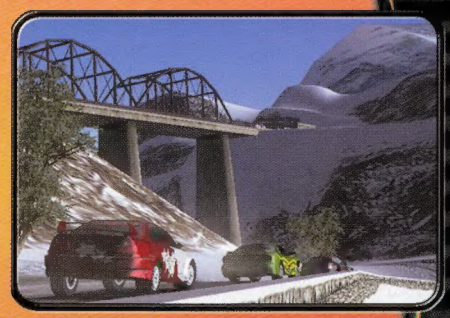
By the looks of the last few issues of **play**, Nelson is passionate about cars—and his co-workers are becoming increasingly concerned. First he showed us digital photos, then he handed us some Sears Portrait Studio glossies. They were adorable—Nelson and automobile in an intimate embrace—which is exactly why we are so scared.

tom ham
contributing writer

Tom asks the tough questions; that's why we at **play** fulfill his every request. After finishing his feature on Sony's first online foray, *SOCOM* (pg. 38), he demanded that we take him on a double-decker bus tour of downtown London. Well, not really. But here's a picture of Tom on a double-decker bus, anyway.

Mysterious Pyramids.
Glorious Victoria Falls.
Herds of Peaceful Giraffes.

THE HOWL OF A TURBOCHARGER.



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Witness the birth of a franchise as Sucker Punch's Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus flies high in the Sony camp.

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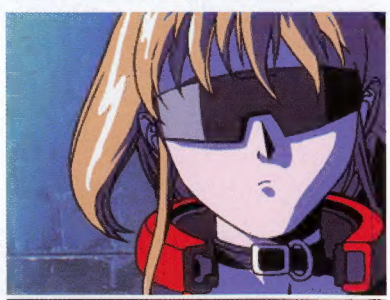

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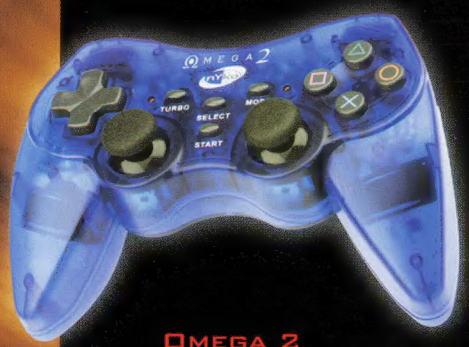

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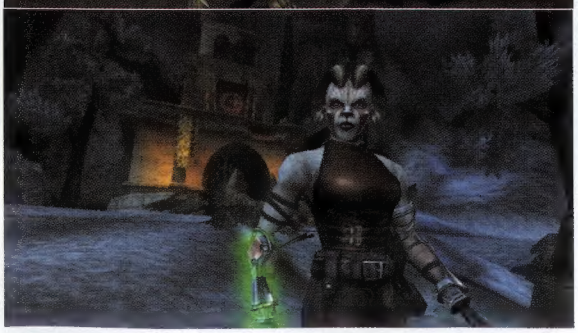
ink

edited by **play** magazine staff

SONY FLEX

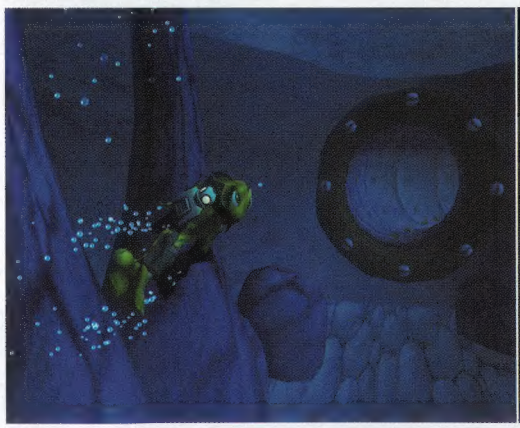
Sony unleashes a bevy of AAA 1st-party software for '02

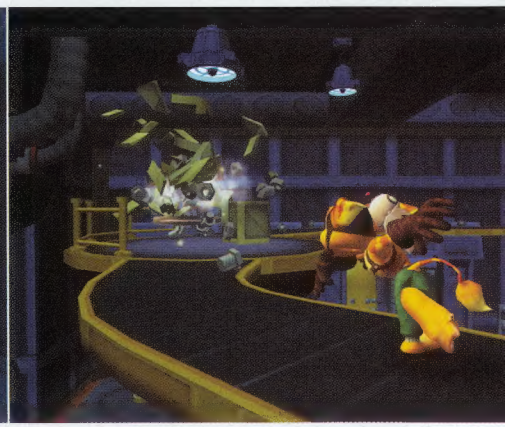
Sony will unload both barrels at this year's E3, when they unveil an unprecedented six first-party titles with franchise implications. Besides the title that graces our cover, Sly Cooper and the Thevius Racoonus, Primal (from the Cambridge team that brought us MediEvil), Insomniac's Ratchet and Clank, Getaway (a polished GTA III-style driving action game) and Mark of Kri (see story, pg. 40) will all be introduced for the first time. Each title boasts innovation in its own unique way, making this a truly noteworthy event. We remember not long ago when only a single company innovated as much. Times are most definitely changing for the better as the video game industry continues to break new ground and shatter the entertainment barrier.



Primal

Cambridge Studios finally reveal their hand, and it's a truly unique adventure steeped in fairy-tale darkness starring a morphing female beauty and her companion, a scaly gargoyle.



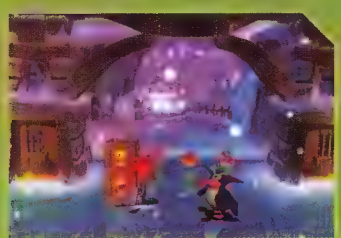


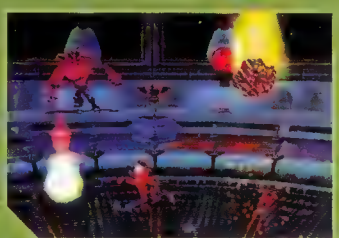
Ratchet and Clank

Reportedly the most awe-inspiring action-adventure game ever witnessed. These shots don't even come close to showing the game's incredible animaton and scope.

The Getaway

Already deemed a sensation in the UK, The Getaway, a massive caper action-adventure, picks up where GTA III left off, only without the gore and hookers.





CRASH BANDICOOT THE WRATH OF CORTEX

Crash. Maxed.

crashbandicoot.com

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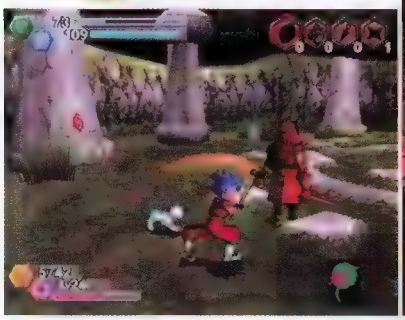
GO GO GOEMON

Working Designs inherit a beloved Konami franchise



Known in these parts as Mystical Ninja (you know: the pudgy troll with blue pineapple hair and freaky friends), Goemon, one of Japan's most beloved game franchises, has lived on virtually every console Japan has ever produced, except for maybe the Neo Geo and PC Engine. The two standout games in the series, The Legend of the Mystical Ninja for SNES and Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon for the Nintendo 64, have both appeared stateside, and are regarded by enthusiasts as legendary games in their respective categories. Now Working Designs, famous for bringing the best of Japan stateside with the tenacity of Jack Black at a nudist colony, will attempt to bridge the gap and introduce him to the masses, with Mystical Ninja Goemon, the blue-haired wonder's first foray into the spectacular world of 128-bit processing power. Developed by Konami Computer Entertainment Kobe, the game's champions, it stands as a shining example of visual and gameplay prowess, with vistas you'll have to see to believe, vast, detailed towns teeming with interactivity and, of course, 3D platforming from the masters at Konami. No word yet on how WD will make it special, but they have already decided to subtitle Mystical Ninja Goemon and retain the original Japanese dialogue, instead of dubbing it into English, which in this case is a wise decision. Mystical Ninja Staring Goemon is currently scheduled for release in the second half of 2002.

Konami has bestowed upon Working Designs the high honor of publishing one of their most prominent and beloved characters.

EVEN SHINY-ER

Jim loads up the truck and moves to Beverly

Hills, that is. Infogrames recently announced the details surrounding their purchase of Shiny Entertainment, home to Earth Worm Jim (before they kicked him out on his ear), MDK, Messiah, Wild 9, and Sacrifice. Infogrames has acquired the full development operations of Shiny and therefore attained exclusive rights to develop and publish games based on the upcoming *Matrix* sequels, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*. Whoa. Other fabulous prizes include Shiny's patented Advanced Tesselation Technology and other tools and assets created at the team's secret lair overlooking the beach in posh Laguna. The price? A mere 47 million in a cash/promissary-note combo—in other words, it's Millah time for DP and the boyz. That'll buy a lot of helicopter fuel. Speaking of DP (that's Dave Perry for those of you who arrived late), Shiny's founding father has signed a "long-term" employment agreement with Infogrames to stay on as president. Meanwhile, development is well under way on The Matrix Reloaded game, on which Dave has been working closely with Andy and Larry Wachowski. After that, seeing as how they've signed on with a supah power, maybe, just maybe, Earth Worm Jim will ride again.

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TIL QUEST DO US PART

Marriage is a most sanctimonious thing—especially online

Anyone who argues that online gaming is impersonal needs to consider this true story: Richard Kowalski and Risa Suzuki made a virtual bond this year, tying the knot via their dial-up SegaNet connection on Phantasy Star Online.

"I was playing my friend's game—I was doing keyboard and he was controlling the character," recalls Kowalski. "I spotted Risa's character in the lobby and asked her if she liked iguanas—I had a pet iguana at the time. She didn't really answer my question, but asked if I would be interested in playing a game. I accepted—and the rest is history." As their quests became progressively harder—trudging through the lair of the Red Dragon to the finale with Dark Falz—their love blossomed. It began like any conversation, starting with favorite movies, foods and hobbies, but after their initial meeting online in February 2001, "the romance escalated with phone calls to each other. I literally have hundreds of used phone cards to testify to this," Kowalski laughingly confesses.

You too can appear in the pages of play. Simply get married and send in your sparkling photos.

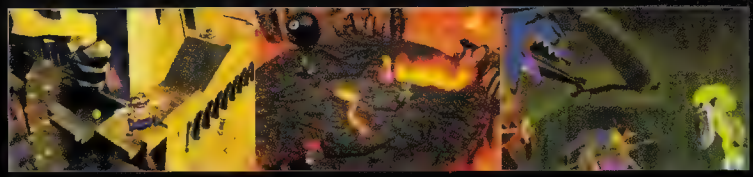
You too can find the person of your dreams online. The bond can be especially pleasant over broadband.

Even though the long distance relationship was successful—Kowalski (a.k.a. "Digital IggY") being U.S. bound and Suzuki (a.k.a. "LIS") overseas in Japan—the couple desperately wanted to meet each other's human counterpart. But it was ultimately a love for Aaron Spelling that brought the two together—at least on Suzuki's part. "She had plans to go on a Beverly Hills, 90210 tour in L.A. in October and we were planning to meet each other there in person." Unfortunately, the tragic events of September 11 delayed their rendezvous until Christmastime. But they have been together ever since, consummating their marriage on Valentine's Day this year.

"We wanted to have a wedding ceremony on PSO, because without the game we would have never met and fallen in love. We really thank Naka-san for his great PSO game! Without his game, none of this would be possible," gushes Kowalski.

LAST-SECOND JOY

This just in! Nintendo to debut Wario World and Mario Party 4 at E3!



Wario World | Mario Party 4 | The Legend of Zelda

top 10

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READERS MOST WANTED

1. FINAL FANTASY X-PS2
2. RESIDENT EVIL 0-GC
3. MARIO SUNSHINE-GC
4. LEGEND OF ZELDA-GC
5. STAR FOX ADVENTURES-GC
6. ONIMUSHA 3-PS2
7. XENOSAGA-PS2
8. HALO 2-XBOX
9. STAR OCEAN 3-PS2
10. PANZER DRAGOON-XBOX

READERS TOP TEN

1. JET SET RADIO FUTURE-XBOX
2. VIRTUA FIGHTER 4-PS2
3. GUN VALKYRIE-XBOX
4. FINAL FANTASY X-PS2
5. HALO-XBOX
6. GRAN TURISMO 3-PS2
7. METAL GEAR SOLID 2-GC
8. GRAND THEFT AUTO 3-PS2
9. BLOODY ROAR-GC
10. SPIDER-MAN-PS2

play TOP TEN

1. SLY COOPER-PS2
2. RESIDENT EVIL-GC
3. WIPEOUT FUSION-PS2
4. JET SET RADIO FUTURE-XBOX
5. GUN VALKYRIE-XBOX
6. MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE-PS2
7. SEGA SOCCER SLAM-GC
8. KINGDOM HEARTS-PS2
9. ONIMUSHA 2-PS2
10. HOT SHOTS GOLF 3-PS2

BEST SELLING APRIL

1. SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 3-GBA
2. GRAND THEFT AUTO 3-PS2
3. VIRTUA FIGHTER 4-PS2
4. SONIC ADVANCE-GBA
5. SONIC ADVENTURE 2-DC
6. 007: AGENT UNDER FIRE-GC
7. GRAND THEFT AUTO 2-PS
8. MOTOCROSS MANIA-PS
9. KNOCKOUT KINGS-PS2
10. TIGER WOODS PGA 2002-PS2

GAME RELEASE SCHEDULE*

PLAYSTATION 2

MAY
5/26 RAYMAN RUSH
5/28 WIPEOUT FUSION
5/28 AGRESSIVE INLINE
5/28 BARBARIAN
5/28 F1 2002

JUNE
6/04 MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE
6/11 FIREBLADE
6/12 COMMANDOS 2
6/16 DROPSHIP: UNITED PEACE FORCE
6/16 LETHAL SKIES
6/16 DROPSHIP: UNITED PEACE FORCE
6/18 MX SUPERFLY
6/18 PRISONER OF WAR
6/25 STUNTMAN
6/25 THE TERMINATOR: DoF
6/26 LEGION: TLoE

JULY
7/16 SKY GUNNER
7/30 AKIRA PSYCHOBALL
7/31 THE THING

AUGUST
8/15 ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS
8/16 TUROK EVOLUTION

GAMECUBE

MAY
5/21 VIRTUA STRIKER 2002
5/28 BOMBERMAN GENERATION

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6/24 TETRIS WORLDS
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6/24 F1 2002

AUGUST
8/1 MADDEN NFL 2003
8/2 DRAGON'S LAIR 3D
8/6 BEACH SPIKERS
8/6 FREEKSTYLE
8/12 TUROK EVOLUTION
8/20 CRASH BANDICOOT
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6/25 SPLASHDOWN

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7/23 BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER
7/23 DEAD TO RIGHTS
7/23 CRAZY TAXI 3: HIGH ROLLER

AUGUST
8/1 MADDEN NFL 2003
8/1 TETRIS WORLDS
8/1 THE TERMINATOR: DAWN OF FATE
8/15 TUROK EVOLUTION
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SEPTEMBER
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*SHIP DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE

play games

018 sly cooper
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review legend

perfect
stellar
great
good
average
poor

- Unleash multiple hi-tech and deadly weapons, including Sniper Cannon, Swarm Missiles, EMP weapon, Rail Gun and Laser Guided Homing Missiles.
- Experience an amazing variety of lush environments, including Swiss Alps, Arizona Desert, Amazon Jungle, and Arctic Circle.
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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

PlayStation®2

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MIDWAY

THE ONLY THING LEFT STANDING IS FREEDOM.

FIRE BLADE

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In the cockpit of Fireblade there is one goal: use whatever means available to annihilate the terrorist cells flaming up around the globe. Battle through 18 Missions in 4 campaigns at the helm of the carrier chopper or the Vendetta attack copter and unleash a barrage of hi-tech deadly weapons. Go turbo, or remain undetected from enemies in stealth mode. To win the war, you've got to end the war. Attack and destroy!

CRITTER GEAR SOLID

Sucker Punch reemerge with their second innovative game, only this time it's honed to perfection and flying the Sony flag.

words dave halverson

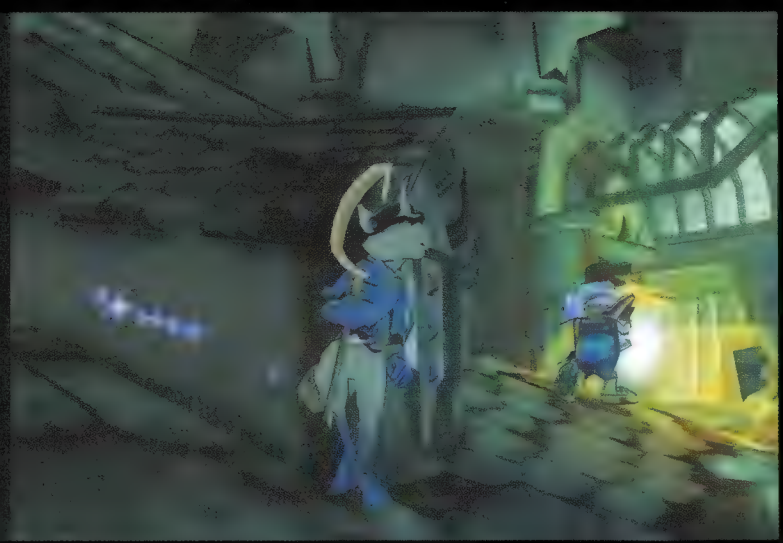
A long time ago (1999), in a galaxy far, far away (Los Angeles), I came to know Sucker Punch. Their first game, Sprocket, which at the time was being shopped around for a publisher, had become the inside buzz of the enthusiast press—the army of rabid video-game editors who burrow into each convention like land piranha year after year, looking for what lies beneath the glitz on the show floor. When I finally got around to playing Sprocket—a quirky, unique, highly advanced adventure game starring a loveable uni-wheel mecha, bursting with possibility and remarkable physics—I was truly amazed. But at the same time, I realized the game wasn't accessible enough for the mainstream, and that Ubi Soft, no matter how good their intentions, hadn't a clue how to market it. The result was a valiant first effort that became one of the 64's best-kept secrets; in fact, if you're so inclined, I highly recommend picking it up.

As a confessed platform fanatic, I often wondered what became of that skilled team, so when the call came in from Sony for the June cover, all they had to say was "Sucker Punch," and I was sold. What are the chances they'd reappear smack dab in the middle of the Year of the Platformer, signed on to make a first-party Sony title with franchise implications written all over it? And better yet, offer us an exclusive cover story? It was a good day.

Playing through the first world of their new brainchild, it was immediately evident that they achieved that magic formula—as Naughty Dog did years ago with Crash Bandicoot—capable of enticing a mass audience and the hardcore enthusiast at the same time—the holy grail of critter-based platforming. It's almost impossible to put your finger on, but when it happens, it resonates right through the control pad.

Sly, something of a humanoid raccoon (think Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle; you get the

"IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO PUT YOUR FINGER ON, BUT WHEN IT HAPPENS, IT RESONATES RIGHT THROUGH THE CONTROL PAD."



Sly doing what he does best—being sly. If the light hits him, the alarm will sound.

SLY LOOKS AND CONTROLS WITH THE ANIMATION AND PHYSICS THAT EVERY HARD CORE GAMER DREAMS OF.

To avoid detection (and becoming a dart-board Raccoonus), Sly takes cover in a barrel.

gist), was born into a family of master jewel thieves and, as a child, given the Thievius Raccoonus, the family tome passed down from generation to generation containing the best-kept secrets of thievery. On his eighth birthday, five shady villains invaded his family's home, clipped his father, stole the precious book, and split it five ways, conveniently creating five hubs and five bosses. Now, ten years later, Sly is ready to avenge his father and restore the family honor by stealing back every last page. Helping him along the way is his trusty yet constipated-sounding sidekick, Bentley, a brainiac turtle with a cool Mystery-Machine-meets-Mission-Impossible van. Bentley chimes in when Sly finds enough clues to crack a safe and nab pages from the book and the wisdom they bring; or to give him the lay of the land in especially precarious predicaments. The resulting gameplay is a cross between the very best platformers and the stealth antics of a Metal Gear Solid, buttoned-up so well that, within seconds, you know you're playing something truly special with far-reaching implications.

Sly looks and controls with the animation and physics that every hardcore gamer dreams of—like the first time you saw (and felt) Alucard or Crash. A cel-shaded masterpiece, he is designed, rendered, and tuned to perfection, from his liquid tail to his perfectly pitched voice—a kind of young Jack Nicholson. The nimble characteristics of an action hero, combined with the gizmos and stealth of a spy, give him the ability to climb, jump, swing, and grapple with eerie silence, or use binoculars, wall hug, and sneak with the best of 'em. And Sucker Punch fuses the two characteristics perfectly, creating a fresh new action-adventure that is sure to lure impersonators, like catnip for copycats. So how'd they do it? Well, you're a van, a talking turtle, and a Thevius Raccoonus away from knowing.

Clever Suckers

The dedicated staff behind Sly Raccoonus answer our queries after our shocking hands-on impression of Sly's initial world...

After your amazing N64 debut, Rocket (a game before its time, I must say), I'm sure a lot of people, especially in the industry, wondered when and where Sucker Punch would strike next. I guess we have our answer. Once again, you have amazed us. Tell us how you came to develop for PS2.

BRIAN FLEMING (Producer, Sucker Punch): Building off of Rocket on the N64, we knew we wanted to do another character action game, and that we were going to shift to one of the new consoles. Being a somewhat smaller team than others, and wanting to make a fantastic game, we really felt we had to focus on a single console to be super successful. The PlayStation 2 was a fairly easy choice over Xbox and Gamecube. We felt pretty confident that PlayStation 2 would continue to dominate the console business worldwide—and hopefully Sly will help sell a few more consoles! Besides the pure numbers, the opportunity to work with Sony and the producers there was another huge reason to focus exclusively on PS2. We also think the PS2 hardware design, while somewhat complex, favors teams who have strong technical staff and the focus to work hard on the details.

When did you come up with the Sly Cooper concept? Was it a single member's vision or a team process?

DEV MADAN (Art Director, Sucker Punch): We started work on this project just after Rocket. We wanted to do a game that revolved around being a thief and doing sneaky, fun things

Hey! We don't see any issues of play on those workstations...what gives? In all seriousness, you're looking at one gifted group of individuals—Sucker Punch.

in places that you couldn't go in real life. In one of our meetings, as we were trying to develop what this thief character would look like...the idea came up that the thief should be a raccoon, and it was great. I mean, the whole sight gag of a raccoon putting on a blindfold was hilarious and the whole thing kind of snowballed from there. The initial idea of Sly being a thief and a raccoon has remained intact, but he has had a few different incarnations since then, both physically as well as personality-wise. And, as people on the team get to work with him, adding their own various touches, Sly continues to develop a stronger personality.

Having thoroughly investigated the first area in the game, we felt a sort of Metal-Gear-meets-critter-driven-platformer vibe that pretty much left us speechless. Our first run in the barrel, for instance (much like Snake in the box), the whole office started golf clapping (the highest honor). Are you indeed attempting to merge platforming and stealth gameplay—the serious and the whimsical?

BRIAN: We think of the game as action-stealth, and we take inspiration from other spy/stealth games as well as other action-platform games. We wanted to keep the pacing of an action game, but integrate elements from spy/stealth games into the play. For example, when you see the flashlight guards, you'll see how we're trying to take stealthy gameplay and make it very action-oriented. The guard's flashlight sweep is easy to see in the 3D world, and so the sequences can be faster than if the player has to use a scanner overlay onscreen. I'd say the game is more stylized than whimsical: we've tried to create a unique visual style and look for this title, to make Sly Cooper stand out in a crowd.

DEV: I think when you get to develop or stylize the world that the character interacts in, you're allowed to take a lot more liberties—take things as over the top as you want and further enhance the experience of being able to do things that you couldn't normally do.

The game also has a distinct cartoon adventure feel, with obvious TV series, movie, and merchandising implications. Are there plans?
BRIAN: We're really focused on making great video games—so this has actually not been seriously discussed at this point.

The play mechanics are brilliant. What sort of tool are you using?
BRIAN: The credit for the mechanics goes to the game designers, character animators and programmers who worked on them. These folks all get lots of input from the rest of the team and from our Sony producers. Action games really need to feel right to be fun, and hopefully we've dedicated enough time to this to get Sly just right.

DEV: I think it's pretty much people around the office trying things out and getting lots of feedback.

Whenever we hear "new critter" these days, it's a little scary, as it is very difficult to create a great one, let alone a compelling universe around it. Sly is brilliant (the first time Sly perches himself, any gamer worth his salt should tear up), as is the Thievius Raccoonus concept, the van, and Sly's constipated-sounding sidekick, Bentley. Universally speaking I see shades of TMNT and Scooby Doo. Were you inspired by any toons in particular?
DEV: I don't know if it's any one particular cartoon or movie that you can point to; this team is made up of a pretty diverse group of people all with a really wide range of influences. We're an eclectic group and when you put us together, you're going to get a game full of surprises.

The voices are perfection. How difficult was it getting your characters just right?
BRIAN: Voices are really hard to get right, and this is a new area for us here at Sucker Punch (Rocket didn't have any voice acting). We've been fortunate to work with some talented actors and experienced producers. The credit goes all to them.

Are you cartoon and/or anime fans? If so, what do you like?
DEV: We're a pretty diverse team with a really wide range in backgrounds and influences, but if you had to say what elements we have in common, you could say that we're culture junkies: from cartoons from the '70s to video games to modern-day anime to movies to comic books. All those influences get thrown in. We also always try to take the afternoon off whenever a cool new movie (animated or otherwise) comes out. There's also always someone around here passing a DVD or comic book around, recommending it for one reason or another.

It must feel great knowing that you've not only created a fresh new triple A title, but that Sony will be putting their very big muscles behind it. Is this the start of something akin to Naughty Dog and Insomniac? You guys certainly have the skills.
BRIAN: Well, honestly we haven't created this title just yet, we've still got months of work to go, but we are very excited to be working with SCEA. We're also excited that the reaction to Sly has been so positive—but really all we can do is work hard to finish the game and then let the team at Sony do their stuff and, more importantly, let the consumers judge for themselves.

How many are you anyway?
BRIAN: Twenty-three at this point (started at roughly 15). Includes our QA manager, front desk, and half-time biz manager.

As someone who lives for these types of games, I haven't felt a character this precise and perfectly balanced in a very long time. Sly is hyper animated, light as air, nimble, and just feels amazing to control. How much time was spent getting him just right? Did he begin looking like he does now, or go through many transformations?

"WE'RE A PRETTY DIVERSE TEAM WITH A REALLY WIDE RANGE IN BACKGROUNDS AND INFLUENCES"

BRIAN: We think this is an incredibly important thing to get right—and it has taken a lot of iterations to get where we are. Beyond the control design and coding, the animation details are also incredibly important for the character to feel right.

DEV: As mentioned earlier, once we decided on a raccoon, we went through numerous changes to evolve him to what he is today. Sly has gone under quite a few looks over the course of this project, reflecting the different personality shifts that he's had; in fact, Sly actually started off a lot pudgier and with a more realistic raccoon body. But then, as he evolved into a more crafty, sly character, we realized that he needed to be physically able to quickly maneuver and sneak around areas. And that's how we got to where he is today.

It's hard to believe that this your first PS2 game. Is this a proprietary engine that you perfected before laying the groundwork for the game? Who's the maestro behind the game's technology. Give him a cookie.
BRIAN: The game is built almost entirely from our own technology—the base was rewritten from Rocket to take advantage of the PS2 architecture. There's not really one person who wrote our engine. Each subsystem (physics, animation, NPC behavior, sound effects, particle effects, core rendering) has been worked on by at least two people, and usually a third person to improve performance. As far as external technology we use, the biggest piece is the Sony/989 Studios dynamic music system, which we really appreciate their making available to us.

Raccoonus Evolutionus

"In one of our meetings, as we were trying to develop what this thief character would look like...the idea came up that the thief should be a raccoon, and it was great; I mean, the whole sight gag of a raccoon putting on a blindfold was hilarious and the whole thing kind of snowballed from there. The initial idea of Sly being a thief and a raccoon has remained intact, but he has had a few different incarnations since then, both physically as well as personality-wise. And, as people on the team get to work with him, adding their own various touches, Sly continues to develop a stronger personality."
-Dev Madan, Art Director, Sucker Punch

From an artistic standpoint you have been able to achieve seamless almost 2D-looking architecture through skillful texture work. Your planks, rooftops, vegetation and water all have a magical story-book quality, without being overly complex or obtrusive. Much of this game's prowess seems to lie in the details. What does it take to achieve this from an artistic and technical standpoint?
DEV: It's taken a few tries to figure out how to build it. We start by working from levels that the game designers build, where a lot of time is spent on camera issues and gameplay experience. Working on the conceptuals after that allows us to enhance what they've laid out, because we have a good idea of what the camera's looking at and where the camera will be—where we can spend our poly budget. From there, the 3D modelers carve out the worlds, tweaking areas and terrain to appeal visually, while trying not to block any gameplay issues. At this stage, there's a lot of "wow, that'd be cool if..." and sometimes the gameplay gets tweaked a bit. From there, the texture artists really bring the levels to life, really paying attention to the details and placing plants and arranging things so that they look good on screen. There's a lot of back and forth with the textures and lighting, as a texture may look good in a fairly bright area, and not work as well in another. So it's very much a collaborative process.

BRIAN: From a technical standpoint, the most significant contribution to the 2D game look is our custom lighting model. The lighting model was developed specifically to render textures in shadow and in light similarly to the way that an artist might paint the backgrounds in an animated movie. One of the great things about PS2 is that, since there is not a built-in lighting system, we could change all sorts of assumptions about how a light should behave, and how textures should look under different lighting conditions.

In order to fully grasp the gameplay it seems that collecting all of the clues in order to harness all of Sly's special moves is pretty key. Is there a point where you will absolutely have to acquire certain skills to progress?
BRIAN: You're right that the clues will let you unlock vaults, which gives Sly a variety of power-ups. For now, all we're willing to say about the power-ups is that they're a lot of fun, and that we think more advanced players will find lots of depth in collecting them.

Who's on board for the music and sound effects, and what are your goals: more ambient or more of a soundtrack that conveys the action on screen?
BRIAN: The game features a dynamic music system, upon which the composer is creating a mostly ambient soundtrack. The key is that the soundtrack is structured such that transitions can happen instantaneously to music that supports action when needed. In addition the soundtrack can get extra quiet at times when Sly is sneaking around, and we want the player to be extra aware of the sounds around him. It's really well done! Sound effects-wise, we wanted to keep the sounds on the exaggerated/athletic side—to reenforce Sly's agility and quickness.

You must be looking at the competition. What games are you impressed with at the moment?
BRIAN: We are so busy that most of us haven't been playing a lot of games lately! Visually? Kingdom Hearts (if we could figure out what's going on) and, of course, Jak and Daxter was impressive. Gameplay wise, you can't beat the guilty pleasure of Grand Theft Auto.

DEV: As Brian mentioned, Jak and Daxter, Grand Theft Auto and, import-wise, Kingdom Hearts is stunning. I'm also a sucker for Space Channel 5 part 2; that game is really fun in both visuals and gameplay. Lately, I've found myself replaying older games.

Your first game (Rocket) was brilliant and fairly complex. What if anything did that experience teach you about yourselves as a team, the industry, and the game-playing public?
BRIAN: We learned a *ton*. From an industry side, we realized that you just can't introduce a new character without both a great game and a *huge* marketing effort by the publisher. About game players? Probably the biggest learning was how much players hate being confused about what to do next.

If you make a game that anyone can play it will ultimately suck, yet we're sure you feel the need to make Sly somewhat accessible for beginners (or not; that would be cool). How do you determine how easy or hard your game should be? Do you cater more to the enthusiasts who are likely now counting the days, or little Jimmy and the K-Mart crew? A word of advice: they're all playing Tony Hawk.
BRIAN: Our approach is to try to make a game that is fun for a really wide range of players. To do this, we've designed the gameplay in layers so that a beginner can actually complete the game, recover the Thievius Raccoonus, and feel like a champ. Yet a more experienced gamer will realize that there's a lot of gameplay locked up in the vaults, and so they'll have an experience somewhat different from the novice gamer. There are even additional challenges beyond the vaults for even more experienced gamers—so hopefully we've created something for everyone.

What is your ultimate goal with Sly?
BRIAN: To recover the Thievius Raccoonus, of course! (at least for this game!)

PS2

SLY COOPER & THE THIEVIUS RACCOONUS

preview

developer: sucker punch publisher: sony available: september

The year of the critter is indeed upon us. Sly Cooper brings a lot of innovation to the genre, standing out as one of this year's very best

WEIRD SCIENCE

Midway's latest mutation is a welcome break from the norm. Don't tell Sub Zero...

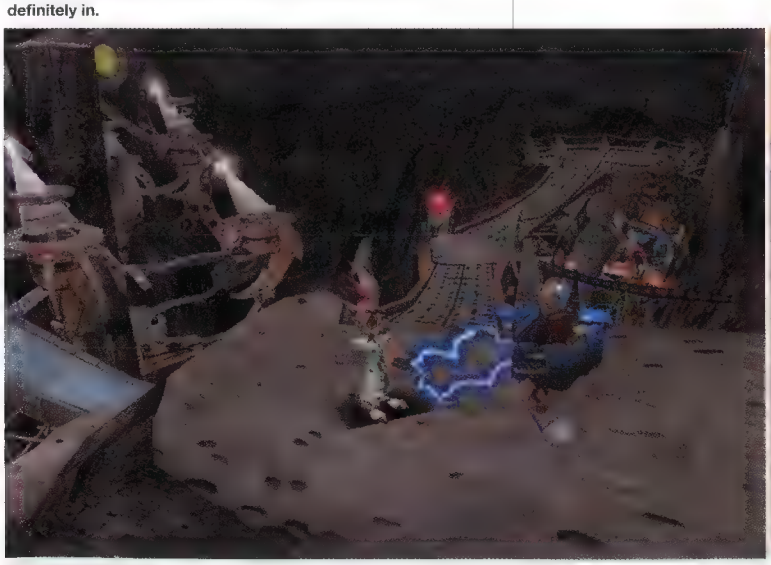
words dave halverson

Mighty Morphin' has a new name, and it's Muto! In Midway's crazy new action-adventure, a mad scientist (Dr. Muto) manages to destroy his entire home planet (except for his lab) when an experiment goes awry, and to get it back into shape, you'll have to play this game. The gist is to morph Muto's DNA with assorted lifeforms from across the galaxy to achieve the super-human state necessary to complete each mission, as Muto gathers resources to make nice with his planet. Of course, Muto's got a nemesis, professor Burnitall (wonder if he knows Mrs. Chokesondick), who does everything he can to thwart Muto and become the master of the universe himself. The game spans 22 levels over four planetscapes that, thankfully, aren't based on seasons or elements. Instead, junk, water, smog, mines, and assorted alien stuff lay in wait. That's right: no snow level. Could this be the end?

Muto uses the Splizz-gun to mutate into all sorts of abominations, from spiders (from Mars?) to a little mousy critter, all the way up to a deformed gorilla. Sounds wacky enough. We won't play Dr. Muto until E3, but it's apparent Midway is onto something big without the word "Thunder" in it or fatalities of any kind. Will they begin anew? I think so, yes. Behind Muto, Freaky Fliers and the long-awaited, much-anticipated Legion are on the horizon. **play**

"MIDWAY IS ON TO SOMETHING BIG WITHOUT THE WORD 'THUNDER' IN IT"

As you can see from these screens, the game doctor is definitely in.



XBOX

DR. MUTO | preview

developer: midway publisher: midway available: fall

An original platformer from Midway? What's next, a sitcom based on a '70s heavy-metal icon?

Think you got what it takes to control her?

ENDGAME

Tons of different modes of play that will keep you coming back for more.

Fully interactive and destructible environments– if you can shoot it, you can hit it.

Run your way through more 20 locations around the world.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

PlayStation.2

Supports Light Gun Peripherals

Guncon

GUNCON2

EMPIRE INTERACTIVE

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KINGDOM COME

Square borrows the magic of Disney while applying their personal touch of wonder

words michael vreeland

The world raised its collective eyebrows when Square announced a Disney-themed action-RPG. Well, the world can lower them now: not only is *Kingdom Hearts* even weirder than one might expect, it's also one of Square's best games to date.

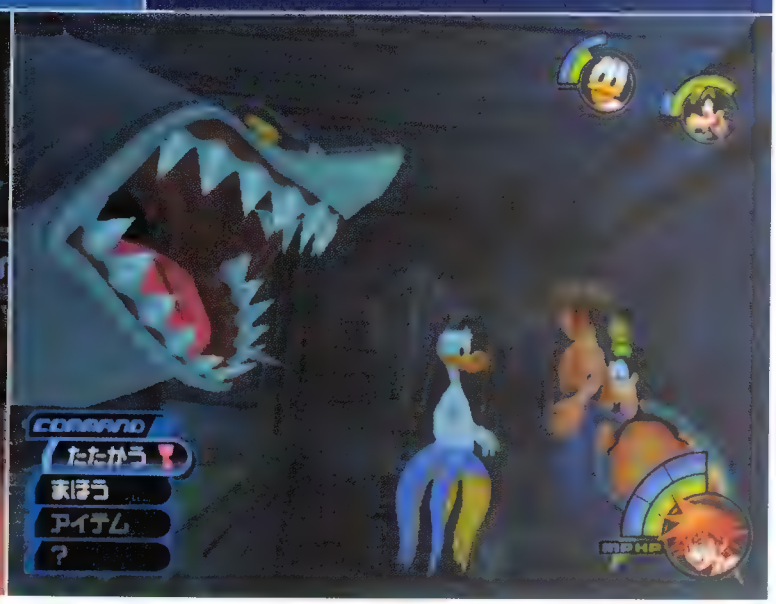
More a Square game set in Disney worlds than an actual Disney game, Kingdom Hearts is an immensely satisfying and strangely dark romp. Players guide Square's own Sora, Donald and Goofy on a quest to find King Mickey and rid themselves of the shadowy menace known as The Heartless. Along the way, players will relive their favorite Disney moments from such movies as *Aladdin* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, lock horns with a cadre of Disney's most wicked villains and perform a variety of Disney-themed side quests, such as finding all 101 Dalmatians. Connecting the various Disney worlds are amusing shooter levels, replete with a customizable "Gummi Ship" piloted by Chip and Dale.

Clearly created by the team responsible for the obsessive-compulsive Legend of Mana, Kingdom Hearts is a light and fast-paced action-RPG in the vein of the SNES classic Secret of Mana. Players run and jump around gorgeous 3D worlds, seamlessly battling scores of Heartless and fighting enormous bosses. Spells and items are accessed with an innovative D-Pad-accessed menu, never interrupting the non-stop action. And what would a Square/Disney production be without wacky Bambi and Dumbo summons?

Skepticism may die hard, but those who give Kingdom Hearts a shot will surely be satisfied if they can get past the Disney facade on an exceptional Square production. Kingdom Hearts is currently slated for a U.S. release on October 14, and will feature plenty of actual Disney vocal talent. **play**

"IT'S ALSO ONE OF SQUARE'S BEST GAMES TO DATE."

A strange and wonderful mix of Disney classics and Square originals, the character designs steal the show.



PS2

KINGDOM HEARTS

developer: square publisher: square/ea available: august

Disney and Square, an unholy alliance sure to please many [illegible] Kingdom Hearts 2

PLAYING THE ROLE

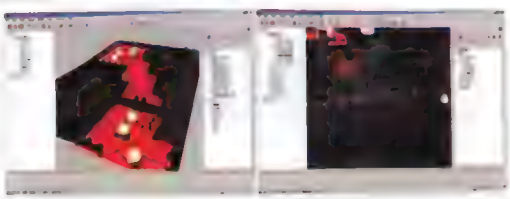
A pure role-playing experience that recalls traditional pen-and-paper

words jon m gibson

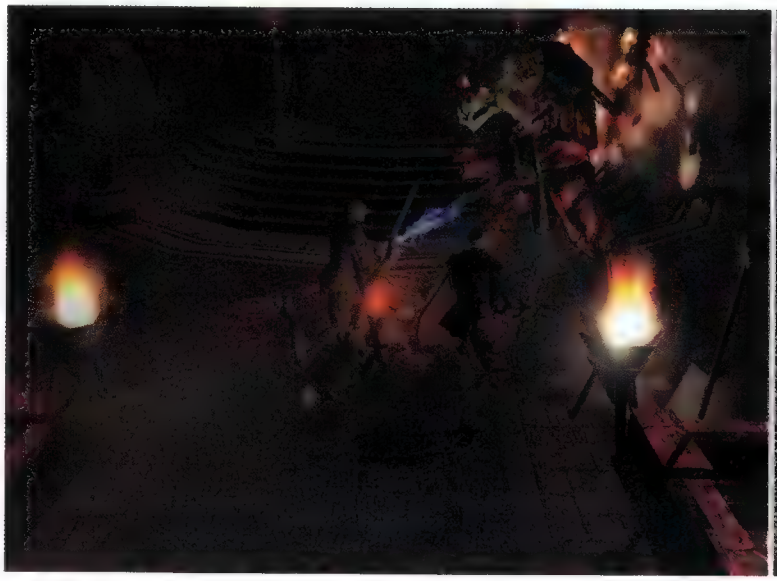
Neverwinter Nights wants to forever change the landscape of role-playing. But it's not an RPG in the more widely known sense (a la the mega-blockbuster Final Fantasy franchise). Neverwinter's roots stem all the way back to the inception of Dungeons & Dragons, a classic, cultish game that has been the Tuesday night hobby of fantasy hounds for the last several decades. The only perquisite: an imagination, pure and casual—and stacks of stat sheets, a barrel of dice, mounds of erasers, dungeon maps, character profiles, a monster encyclopedia—the list goes on. But most taxing, as most D&D players will immediately agree, is the clashing of personal schedules (Bobby has to work at the Gap tonight; Billy has finals tomorrow). BioWare, the brilliant developer behind the Baldur's Gate and MDK series—as well as the upcoming Star Wars RPG, Knights of the Old Republic—is about to redefine that climate, melding the pen-and-paper legacy with modern technology. And here are the results.

As a single-player experience, you're initially offered a character creator that follows all the rules of 3rd Edition D&D—to the last drop (dexterity, wisdom, stamina, magic, race, and extremely distinct looks). You'll quickly be tossed into a prelude, wherein a plague, called "Wailing Death," is ravaging the city of Neverwinter. The city has been quarantined and a mayday is immediately sent to the neighboring town of Waterdeep. The local wizard, Khelben Blackstaff Arunsun, then assembles a collection of rare, magical creatures that are thought to serve as possible cures for the plague. But as the caravan moves toward Neverwinter, it is ambushed and the animals scatter into the midnight brush. A band of adventurers are promptly sent to reclaim the Waterdhavian, all while the Wailing Death gradually eats away at the heart of Neverwinter. Through four progressive chapters—totaling over 60 hours of play—your quest will soon unravel a deep conspiracy and hopefully prove successful in saving the suffering city. As they have historically done with their other D&D ventures, BioWare is keeping the rest of the plot under lock and key.

Thus far, though, Neverwinter isn't too unlike other RPG fare. But slide an Ethernet cable into your PC and the experience is heightened to a completely different level. Suddenly, the single-player game enters into a multi-player world; it's a seamless blend. Explore and battle as a lone dwarf or take on the adventure with a group of friends (when the game launches, the online community will be surging throughout all



The options in Neverwinter are plentiful and pressure free: buy it for the single-player quest, go online with friends or just create your own world.



hours of the day).

Or simply tap out of the pre-installed story and go rogue. With the "Dungeon Master Client," D&D purists are given the chance to control the script. As a DM, you can insert and incinerate creatures, items, and all sorts of other crucial elements in gameplay, or possess non-player characters and monsters, controlling their every action and word; many more intricate threads exist that manipulate the adventure at hand. It's a very familiar concept for pen-and-paper aficionados—but in Neverwinter, it's been given a futureshop remake. The images that were once merely illustrations in those Forgotten Realms handbooks are now visible—and playable—on your monitor in three dimensions. The individual imagination is partially lost, but the overall experience is hard to argue: It's intoxicating to the point that it's exhausting—but, all the while, completely enjoyable from startup to shutdown.

Pushing the technology a bit further is the Aurora Toolset, a stellar level construction program that allows you, the RPG connoisseur, to create your own, private epic. Fear not, though—its comfortable interface allows for ease of use. You'll quickly learn how to mold an adventure using pre-baked characters; or for the David Lynch wannabe, create a world in which mad cows fire magic missiles and penguins speak French better than Gérard Depardieu. And using BioWare's dynamic "Portal System," each fantasyland that you craft can be linked to those of fellow RPG auteurs. By using such a modular structure, Neverwinter Nights is virtually endless; the gameplay possibilities are infinite.

And you thought Everquest was addicting. **play**

"NEVERWINTER NIGHTS IS VIRTUALLY ENDLESS; THE GAMEPLAY POSSIBILITIES ARE INFINITE."

PC

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS | preview

developer: bioware | publisher: infogrames | available: summer

It's only a few months away, but it's been in the cooker for an entirety. Finally, Dungeons & Dragons fans can breathe

TEMPERED STEEL

Steel Batallion is coming, along with its 41-button monster pad. Thanks Capcom

words peter garden

I actually doubted that this game would come out in the States. Hardcore mech action doesn't seem to be American's cup of tea, whereas the Japanese culture is literally saturated with robots. But if I had a smidgen of doubt about this Steel Batallion's domestic future, I had a whole boatload of it over this game's real claim to fame, its now-legendary 41-button control bay. This, I thought, would never officially come out here. But Capcom has proven me doubly wrong, and aren't they great for that?

Known in Japan as Tekki (and curiously before that, Brain Box), Steel Batallion is coming for the Xbox with its monster interface in tow. Though we've not had the chance to actually play the game yet, it promises the most intense and "realistic" mech game of all time (I use the quotes because no one knows outside of an anime what the hell it would actually feel like to actually pilot a bipedal mech). But this game drips with "authenticity." Just look at the detail of the heads-up-display. And then there's that controller, a dual-stick, three-bay beast. The insanity of this contraption is matched only by my desire to feast upon it and have a mech fantasy meltdown. It should be fun. **play**

This lucky player is really getting into it, as will we all when Steel Batallion hits later this year.

STEEL BATALLION | preview

developer: capcom | publisher: capcom | available: winter

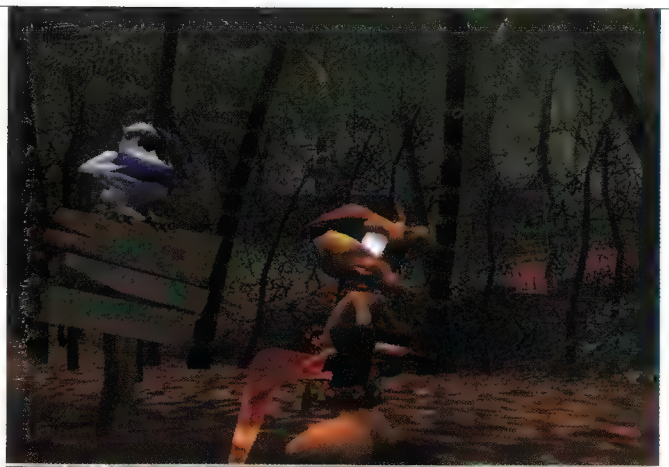
The most OTT controller of all time headed Stateside with the release of Capcom's Steel Batallion the mother of all mech games

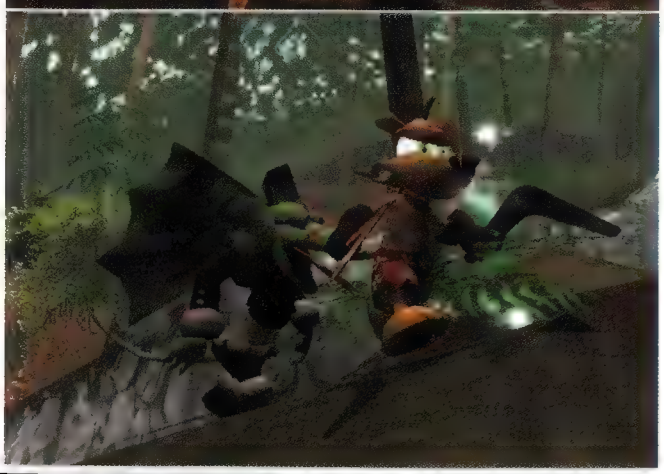
BYE TONY

There's a new tiger in town and he's got the words 'Electronic Arts' on his collar

words dave halverson

And in further news surrounding the year of the critter, EA has thrown their extremely large hat into the ring, announcing Ty the Tasmanian Tiger, the tale of a Tasmanian tiger who believes that he's the last of his kind, only to discover there are more of his kind trapped within a parallel universe called Dream Time, located deep within the Australian outback. It's Australian for advent-cha, mate! Separating itself from the rest of the action pack, the game boasts a unique mixture of gameplay styles in a humorous setting (one can only imagine; those Aussies are a hoot). Besides using a variety of boomerangs for a throng of ranged attacks, Ty can drive, swim, glide, and interact with the game's environments, indigenous of the Australian outback. I wonder if the last boss will be the Crocodile Hunter? Crikey! E's a reh one, idn't he? Lookit is awaiin shert, and git a load of those uuge paws! **play**





EA hasn't introduced a new critter in a good long time, so we figure this tiger has some teeth.

"CRIKEY! E'S A REH ONE, IDN'T HE. THOSE AUSSIES ARE A HOOT!"

PS2 | NINTENDO GAMECUBE

TY TIGER | preview

developer: krome studios | publisher: ea | available: q3

What, you've never seen a tiger with a boomerang being chased by lizards in Australia before? Dude, where've ya been?

SUPER FREEK

EA BIG bust out their mad skills on Motocross. Hold onto your helmets

words dave halverson

The first time I saw Freekstyle, I was like, "Yeah right, extreme motocross fueled by tricks, this will surely suck hard." Too many games with the name "Thunder" attached—synonymous for we couldn't balance the game, so we just littered it with strategically placed power-ups for boost—have jaded me badly. And as for gaining boost by doing tricks as a catalyst for gameplay? Please, don't offend me. I wanna race. Give me physics, realistic terrain, and real competition, or I'll pass.

It took something BIG to change my mind, but change it has; at least, in respect to EA Sports BIG Freekstyle, an amalgamation of motocross, extreme freestyle, speed, and attitude, which plays unlike anything in the vastly over-saturated racing market. Freekstyle doesn't compete with any other MX game; it's an entirely new breed of motocross. Conventional motocross tracks have been replaced by beastly behemoths, laden in twisting rails, flaming loops, and insane drop-offs. Jetting around them at insane speeds, you'll bust out tricks that actually look cool, which, combined with the air time to do 'em and a modifier for extra style, make flying the friendly skies an entirely new experience. Combined with an intense racing attack, the gameplay is balanced in such a way that Freekstyle comes off as less gimmick and more substance. And since it's BIG, it's all wrapped in a pop-culture package that comes off funny and cool, instead of cheesy and forced, as these things almost always do. The racing, which requires choosing lines, landing properly and looking for short cuts, is pretty tight, although the emphasis on winning does rely on tricks. Filling your Freek gauge by using modifiers, once you let it go, you get a prolonged burst of speed that, when timed correctly, will almost always result in a win, provided you're in the mix.

The riders also vary quite a bit. Mike Metzger (covered with tattoos) and Brian Deegan are among the men signed on, but the ladies get equal billing, including Miss Supercross Leeann Tweeden. There are eight selectable characters at the outset, each with separate attributes, attitudes, available bikes, upgrades, and outfits. I could go on, but I need to save something for the review. If the game hits before then, you know what to do. **play**

"FREEKSTYLE IS AN ENTIRELY NEW BREED OF MOTOCROSS."

And then she asked me if I wanted a ride, to which I exclaimed, Oh lord yes, please!

PS2

FREEKSTYLE | preview

developer: page 44 | publisher: ea big | available: spring

EA BIG do what they do best, take an already extreme sport and pump up the volume. If you thought SSX was tricky, wait'll you get a load of this.

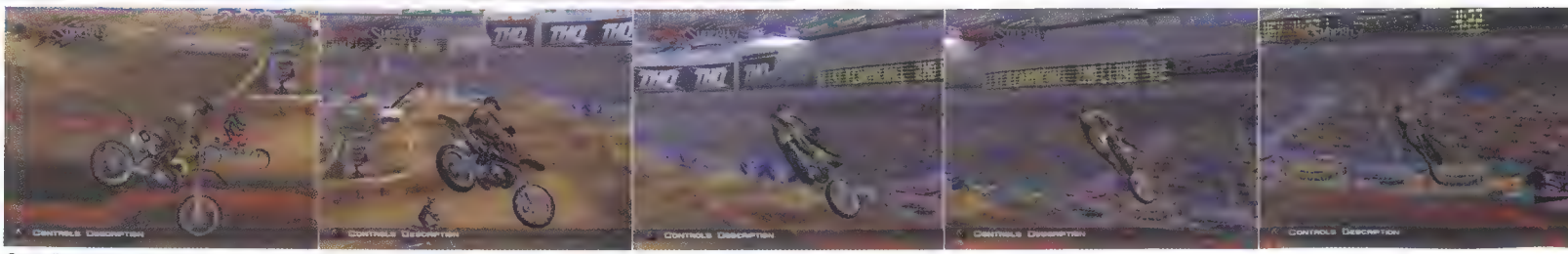
DIRT DEVIL

Pacific Coast Power and Light continue to write the manual on video-game motocross

words dave halverson

"PCP&L HAVE THROWN CONVENTION TO THE WIND, TURNING US LOOSE IN ENTIRE CITIES"

After my concerned-sounding preview of SuperFly—Pacific Coast Power and Light's Ricky Charmichael follow-up for 2002—the producer dropped by the office and exorcised my demons. Laying hands on this year's model, I'm happy to say that the addition of the silly (or not so, in this case) freestyle drudgery has not taken the emphasis away from the career portion of the game in any way. On the contrary, the career mode is greatly enhanced with female racers joining the pro ranks (which now covers pretty much anyone who's ever put on a pair of leathers), better physics (if you can imagine), and even real-time mud accumulation. Riding on the precision controls that made it last year's MX racer to beat, SuperFly looks like it will raise the bar yet again, even though the heat is off. With McGrath in for repairs and Freekstyle leaning more towards the extreme, Ricky's all alone in sim town—at least until Pastrana's new game coming from Activision leaves the starting gate. Going back to this year's freestyle antics, hell, even I'm on board. PCP&L has thrown convention to the wind, turning us loose in entire cities to leap from building to building like crazy people. They've taken a torque wrench to the music, too, adding some much-needed diversity to the mix. **play**



Superfly's replay feature is as comprehensive as they come.

PS2 | NINTENDO GAMECUBE

MX SUPERFLY | preview

developer: pacific coast power and light | publisher: thq | available: summer

Pacific Coast Power & Light continue to write the [illegible] to create the [illegible] video game [illegible]

STILL SUPER

Not to be out done by Spider-Man Superman gets ready for his big game debut.

words jon m gibson

2002 could be dubbed the Year of the Cape. Superheroes abound, leaping into movie theaters (*Spider-Man*), exploding at your local comic shop (*Frank Miller's Dark Knight 2*), and soaking in the limelight of gamedom (Batman, Superman, Aquaman, the X-Men and Spider-Man are all currently being rendered for control on the mighty joypad). But unlike the cover story for the April issue of play, The Last Son of the Planet Krypton is heading in a more comic book-friendly direction—and this time, it's his Xbox debut.

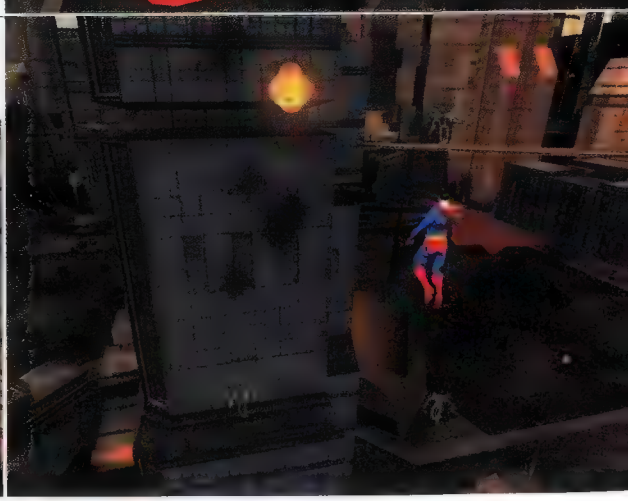
In Superman: The Man of Steel, you'll instantly notice a mature air: Clark dons his usual spandex threads, but unlike Shadow of Apokolips (*The Animated Series* counterpart), his conditioned hair shines, his cape flows effortlessly, his six-pack has volume, and his facial expressions have far more depth. It's all thanks to the future-driven Xbox, allowing even the superpowers of the game to radiate like never before—super strength, heat vision, flight, ice breath, x-ray vision, telescopic vision and a whole lot extra. Two combat modes—in-flight and earthbound—round out the villain-pounding package.

Welcome some famous foes as well: Bizzaro #1, Metallo, Mongul, and the Cyborg all play an intricate role in the DC-penned plot. But it's ultimately Brainiac 13 that propels the story into disaster, weaving through the bellows of Metropolis in an attempt to steal some, shall we say, awe-inspiring technology. So as the city leans on the edge of total destruction, Superman is called to action. Through 15 massive levels—lined with tons of pedestrians, flying cars and meteors, all maintained at a solid framerate—The Man of Steel must battle through his obligatory big city home, the Phantom Zone, Warworld and even deep space. Take into account some outlandish effects—vertex and pixel shaders for added realism in textures, detailed character animations, bump-mapping, and some shocking particle effects (taking smoke, water, and explosions to the next stratum)—and it's obvious that the Superman fanboy has yet another reason to adopt a next-gen view on life.

Put down that book, grab a controller and celebrate the next phase of the interactive comic. The experience is finally reaching full steam. **play**

"YOU'LL INSTANTLY NOTICE A MATURE AIR..."

The environments alone should be inspiring to DC aficionados. Admire the details.



XBOX

SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL | preview

developer circus freak studios | publisher infogrames | available fall

With the PS2-exclusive Shadow of Apokolips already headed in a promising direction, The Man of Steel doubles the chances of Superman trumping all other superheroes this holiday season.

MONSTER'S BALL

Godzilla rumbles onto our shores once again... and this time he's pissed at Roland Emmrich

words jon m gibson

There's an unwritten rule in America that gigantic, scaly beasts aren't allowed to attain Brad Pitt status. Just chart the progressive chain of Godzilla's so-so run domestically: most recently, Godzilla 2000 achieved only lackluster ticket sales at your local cineplex. And the last game based on the heroic monster was 1997's Godzilla Generations. But Japan has plenty more that never saw the light of day at Wallmart.

"I think the U.S. audience has always been ready for a great Godzilla game. Unfortunately, the past games didn't quite meet the gamers' high expectations," says Kirby Fong, producer at Infogrames. "Even though, graphically, the Dreamcast titles were good, the play mechanics just weren't what the U.S. audience was expecting. While we've designed Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee with the Godzilla fan in mind, we've also made it so that even if, for some strange reason, you're not a Godzilla fan, you'll still enjoy taking control of a giant monster and wreaking havoc on a city." It's true: Destroy All Monsters packs the edge of Tekken and Virtua Fighter, but with the flavor of The Scaled One installed. The fighting mechanics may not be as advanced, but the atmosphere is that of hardcore combat—bodies flail and, unlike the "other" fighters mentioned, cities collapse.

Through 10 arenas—Tokyo, London, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Osaka and the volcanic Monster Island—every skyscraper and every vehicle plays host to your ferocious fists. "Our sense of scale is like no other," Fong argues. "Other fighting games claim they're 3D-fighters, but you basically just circle each other in a tiny arena. In Destroy All Monsters, you can go anywhere you want in a living, breathing cityscape." The cities are so intricate, in fact, that the player may never even catch a glimpse of it all. Working lampposts, law-abiding traffic, animated neon signs, populated office interiors (lights snap on and off)—it all adds to the dimension, the raw power, of actually destroying an environment that humans inhabit.

The big city residents even call upon the military to defend their hometown. If combat becomes too outrageous, helicopters and tanks will begin firing on the most cataclysmic player (whether that is you or the AI-operated enemy). So it helps to toss your opponent into buildings; the humans will proceed by launching an all-out attack.

But without a roster of Toho-brand creatures, Destroy All Monsters wouldn't be the same. Enter Godzilla 2000, Godzilla '90, Mecha Godzilla, Gigan, Anguirus, King Ghidora and about seven more unannounced rubber suit celebrities. Other famed monsters also make cameos, but merely in the form of non-playable summons: Mothra swoops in with an air strike, Smog Monster wanders through leaving a toxic trail of soot. Even an obligatory UFO flies onscreen occasionally, beaming in some useful power-ups.

And maybe, just maybe, if you swing that tail hard enough and earn the coveted World Championship belt, you'll unlock the original Atari 2600 Godzilla game. How's that for a blast fromthe giant monster's 50-year past? **play**

"THE U.S. AUDIENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN READY FOR A GODZILLA GAME."

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

GODZILLA: DESTROY ALL MONSTERS MELEE | preview

developer piperworks software | publisher infogrames | available winter

Just in time for the big guy's 50th anniversary celebration, Destroy All Monsters Melee should fue the destructive urges of all gamers—Zilla fan or not.

TURN ON THE LIGHTS

Eternal Darkness is Nintendo's inaugural first-party venture into mature gaming—on GameCube, that is. Blood will spill

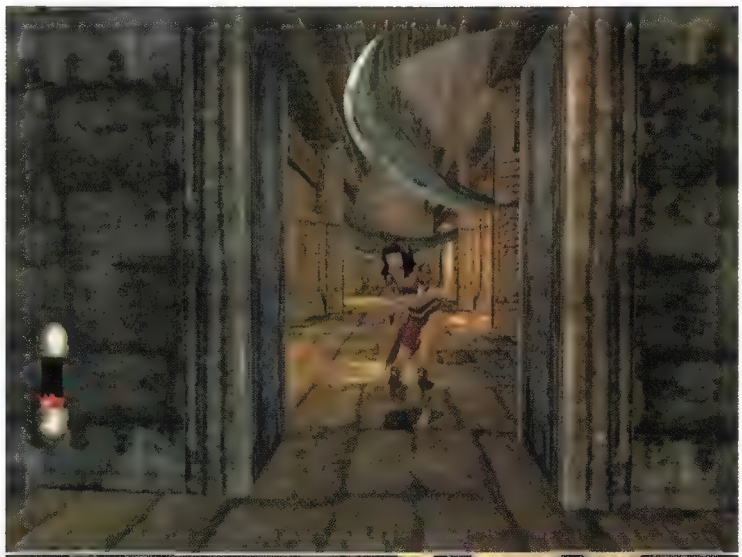
words tom ham

Hype. We see and hear it everyday in our lives. Whether it's on TV, the radio or in magazines, we're constantly bombarded with it. And if there is one industry that is no stranger to it, without question, it is gaming. Some would even argue that the game industry hypes things up more than Hollywood. Yes, that's hard to imagine, but think about this scenario: How many times have you bought a game because of the flashy advertising or a cool commercial you saw on TV? And then when you brought it home and it was utter crap? Oh yes, I feel your pain.

But there are also games that warrant the publicity that they build, like Grand Theft Auto 3, Halo and Metal Gear Solid 2. What's significant with these titles was the fact that they delivered on what they'd promised: compelling, thrilling gameplay. For once, you could believe the hype.

So the question arises, what do we have to look forward to this year? What game has been generating the hype? Since it was first unveiled on N64 over two years ago, Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem has been a large conveyor of such anticipation. Developed by Silicon Knights (the brilliant minds behind the original Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain), what could have been a game that got shuffled away and forgotten on N64 has found new life on GameCube. Not only is Eternal Darkness a top-tier, first-party game for Nintendo, it's also sporting a M rating, catering to the highly sought-after adult audience. This is one of the most important games for the GameCube, and lucky for me, I got to play it firsthand.

"Eternal Darkness is really a mix of different games," explains Denis Dyack, president of



The environments in Eternal Darkness are some of the most enthralling yet on GameCube.

This gentleman is now thinking, "Oh crap, there is a slimy, skinless freak latching onto my back."

Silicon Knights. "It has action, adventure, horror and even some RPG elements. We've been working on this for quite some time and we're really excited about it. The GameCube has let us fully realize our vision of Eternal Darkness."

The story spans 2,000 years of human history, from ancient Roman times to present day. Players take on the role of Alexandra Rovias, a young woman who travels to Rhode Island to investigate the mysterious death of her grandfather, famed clinical psychologist Dr. Edward Rovias. After further inquiry, she soon discovers the book of Eternal Darkness, a leather-bound transcript of tremendous power, allowing players to take on the role of various characters throughout history via flashbacks. "There are 12 characters—or as we like to call it, stories in the game," continues Dyack. "Each of the 12 characters has their own unique storyline which ties into one big, epic storyline. Eventually, Alexandra will figure out the secret to human history and then figure out what really happened to her grandfather."

But the heart and soul of the game revolves around exploration. "We reward the player for being meticulous when exploring the various environments in the game. The more you explore, more pages of the book become available to you," says Dyack, "which, in turn, gives you more players to experience." So just how long is the gameplay? "Each player or character can take anywhere from 2-3 hours to complete," says Dyack. "Some take even longer. We're hoping players will get over 60 hours worth of gameplay from Eternal Darkness."

"...YOU HAVE THE MAKINGS OF ONE THRILLING RIDE."

You're probably thinking, "Why the M rating?" The game sounds pretty tame, right? Think again. After playing through a hefty portion of the game, I encountered crawling corpses, possessed zombies and other assorted minions of evil. "We have a unique combat system in the game as well," continues Dyack. "You can pick which part of the body to hit with your weapons. You can pinpoint the head, arms, legs or body—whatever you want." And when you combine nightmarish environments—complete with cool fog effects and wicked shadows that will make your skin crawl—you have the makings of one thrilling ride.

But what really made me jump and look over my shoulder was the incredible use of sound in Eternal Darkness. From the cries of the ghosts to the ambient noises in the various environments to the beautiful, dynamic musical score, it was all quite impressive. "There is so much music in the game," says Dyack, "you could fill two CDs worth." Coupled with Dolby Surround support, Eternal Darkness gets even creepier.

It's quite apparent that Silicon Knights and Nintendo have done their homework, creating a gaming experience that is truly one of a kind. With its great storyline, deep gameplay and open-ended design, Eternal Darkness looks to be well worth the wait. **play**

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

ETERNAL DARKNESS | preview

e... ...oper silicon knights p...blisher nintendo ...available ...ne

Not only is this a major first-party effort, it also shows Nintendo's commitment to adult games. Silicon Knights has the capacity and talent to bring this epic title to fruition on GameCube.

STOP PLAYING WITH YOURSELF

SOCOM is set to change the face of online gaming on the console forever. It's time to reach out and kill someone

words tom ham

Remember back in the day when you played your first deathmatch over a LAN or through a modem? You'll probably never forget the first time you saw your buddy run in front of you... before you nailed 'im in the back. Admit it. You couldn't help but laugh because the whole concept was just too damn cool. Classic games like Doom, Duke Nukem and Quake have paved the way for multiplayer gaming to explode into the mainstream. After a hard day at the office, nothing beats fragging a few folks you don't know over the Internet.

And if you really think about it, the one thing wrong with the typical deathmatch formula is just that. It's just a deathmatch. Mind you, there is nothing wrong with going around endless Quake and Unreal levels, showing your skills for everyone to see, but come on folks: you can only do that for so long before it gets old.

A trend in multiplayer gaming that has really blown the lid off the deathmatch game is cooperative play. Games like Counter-Strike and Tactical Ops have given multiplayer games like Half-Life and Unreal Tournament unbelievable replay value (even Doom and Doom II had cooperative modes). People who vowed never to play a deathmatch game again have found they can't put a cooperative game down for a second. For once, it's not all about you (which, for some of you, is hard to deal with); it's all about teamwork.

All this killing online is great if you're a PC gamer, but what about console players? Unfortunately, for consoles, playing online has been anything but easy. Sure, Sega did an excellent job with their sports games and Phantasy Star Online, but what about hardcore

action? Unreal Tournament and Quake III Arena were admirable efforts, but, again, having only a 56K modem limited the amount of fun you could have.

Enter SCEA and Zipper Interactive. In development for over two years is Sony's answer for action-starved console players, SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALS. Played from either the third-or-first-person perspective, SOCOM puts players in the boots of the baddest mo' fos on the planet. "This is the only game that is endorsed by the U.S. Navy SEAL Team," explains Jim Bosler, president and CEO of Zipper Interactive. "We not only motion-capped actual SEALS for this game, but we also used their input to make sure SOCOM is true to life. This isn't an arcade game. There are no power-ups or make-believe weapons. This is real combat." And this commitment to realism shines through when playing SOCOM.

But it's not only a multiplayer game; it also showcases a rather robust single-player game. "We didn't want to abandon the single-player experience," continues Bosler. "In fact, players will learn basics in single-player that they can carry over into the multiplayer mode. Players will learn about movement, point of entry and even how to effectively use each of the game's 30 unique weapons."

You're probably thinking, "If this is a game based on teamwork, how is that possible in a single-player game?" Good question. "The player will have AI teammates in the game," explains Bosler. "We have scripted their AI under the guidance of the Navy SEALS. They will cover you, watch your back and even go forth and attack on their own. It's all up to you." Using an intuitive GUI, players are able to issue orders to teammates with simple button pushes on their controller. Commands range from "Able Team Go!" and "Covering fire!" to "Stand down!" and "Enemy Spotted." In total, there are over 100 different commands in the game.

And it gets better. Players will also be able to actually speak to their AI teammates via a USB headset (which ships with the game). Players will be able to issue commands just like if they were a commanding officer out in the field. "We're using a proprietary voice recognition technology," continues Bosler. "You'll be impressed how accurate and responsive it is." To be quite honest, it was eerie hearing your AI teammates respond with "Affirmative" or "Roger that" on your headset.

The missions in SOCOM offer players a multitude of real-life situations. Some missions require you to rescue hostages while others involve reconnaissance. "We designed our mission areas to be tactical," says Bosler. "SEALS are stealthy and strategic and above all, teamwork is paramount. If you go in with a run-and-gun attitude, you're going to die real quick."

But the true star of SOCOM is the online multiplayer mode. We here at play got to check out the multiplayer first-hand against 16 other human opponents. We can't describe how cool it was playing cooperatively with other real players. "You'll be able to communicate online either via keyboard or headset," says Bosler. "Missions will be indoors as well as outdoors. One group will play as the SEALS while the other will be terrorists."

And when you combine impressive visuals, tight controls and authentic sound effects into the mix, what you end up with is a topnotch single- and multiplayer experience that will surely make PC gamers take notice. **play**

"SEALS ARE STEALTHY AND STRATEGIC AND ABOVE ALL, TEAMWORK IS PARAMOUNT."

PS2

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS | preview

[illegible] SOCOM [illegible] multiplayer gameplay on a console [illegible]

IT'S ALIVE!

The Mark of Kri takes video-game animation to a new high point, peeling the game directly off of the designer's pad. Think Disney, only interactive—and violent.

words jon m gibson

Live the cartoon. It may not be the slogan for *The Mark of Kri*, but it damn well should be. Vibrancy, fluidity, action, scope—those are just a few of the many hyper-enthralling layers of what is essentially the first truly interactive 'toon. But don't jump to any conclusions quite yet; check your Disney-esque preconceptions at the door. The concept must be explained:

"We didn't want our game to look 'real,'" beckons Jay Beard, Executive Producer and Director of Product Development at SCEA, San Diego Studios. "As Erik Medina, Lead Animator for *Mark of Kri*, states, 'Everything about this game is better than reality—everything is exaggerated. None of these moves are possible in real life; that's why they look so cool.'" But pen and paper are hardly a proper showcase for such animated arcade action; the screenshots are static, they're immobile.

Although, imagine for a second that the game's lead temper, Rau (*your* playable warrior), were to climb out of his glossy magazine cage—if he were to leap off the page. First, he wanders to the edge of this colorful spread, peering over the preview bar, examining his surroundings. Then, as he turns his back, he notices a few enemies in a neighboring image. The threat is obvious as they, too, climb out of the screenshot, gaining a third dimension. Action must be taken. He draws his bloodstained sword, fresh with the dripping plasma of his previous kill. And the savagery commences. Rau stabs the first grunt through his bamboo armor, causing blood to stain his Indian headdress; and then he spins 180˚ around and slices another's foot off. As the body loses balance and falls, he returns to his first victim, left for mere moments to clasp his open wound. But there is no time for negotiation—just pure, thunderous violence. Rau's second 180˚ whirl ends with his enemy's decapitation. Yet, out of the corner of his eye, he spots one last native, temporarily paralyzed by the scene of carnage. So like any great warrior, Rau slides his sword into its sheath and equips his longbow for a projectile attack. Loading an arrow, he considers his options: head, heart, stomach, or crotch. Finally, pulling far back, he pauses only momentarily to confirm his target... and fires. The diamond-tipped arrow nails the ant-like fighter directly between his eyes—piercing brain matter—slaying him instantly.

Now you can wipe up that pool of gore from this issue of **play**. The war is over, but at least you

know what to expect in way of the articulated action—it's stylish and ripe with fury.

"By putting emphasis on and punctuating the animations, we allow an average person to quickly look good at playing the game," Beard says. "In a lot of games, you can stab a guy with a sword; but when you stab someone in *The Mark of Kri*, you *really* stab them—not to mention when you skewer them with the Taiaha, or decapitate two or three with a sweep of the broad axe, or if you silently pin one guy to the wall with your sword, you always execute the move in a very pronounced way." That's the primary basis for this beautiful, rich actionier. And if you don't believe such precision animation is really possible, consider this fact: An average next-gen console game tends to haul 150 to 200 animations for a lead character; *Mark of Kri* overflows with an astounding 130,000 frames throughout the game, all hand-drawn by a select group of artists hired out of a few of the "smaller" production houses in Hollywood: Disney, Bluth, and Nickelodeon.

The gameplay model, too, is as fierce as a sledgehammer blow. Beard illustrates: "Our combat system came from our love of arcade action, and from wanting to fight multiple enemies—I mean *really* fight them. The multiple opponent games that were our predecessors forced you to turn and face your opponent before you could attack him. Most of these games felt like I was driving a car, not controlling a dexterous warrior. So we set out to develop a system that allowed us to fight a group of enemies—more akin to a martial arts movie. In *Kri*, I can slash the guy in front of me, then instantly head-butt the guy to my left before stabbing and taking out the guy behind me—without ever having to re-orientate my character." The concept of group-based combat is actually extremely effective, straying far from the obvious problems that first pop to mind. Targeting is handled using the left analog stick (a beam of light shoots our of Rau's torso and can be controlled at will), so you simply rotate around the battlefield to highlight your desired victims. Each enemy will then be associated with one of four symbols on the control pad (X, circle, square, and triangle)—and the brutality can begin. Tap in combos or just play it as a one-button beat 'em up. Either way, the control set is as easy as a first grade math test.

But it's not entirely a hack 'n' slash limb-fest. *Mark of Kri* also manages to squeeze in some tactical elements. "Kuzo—a large black bird who serves as Rau's spirit guide—plays a key strategic role," Beard explains. "Rau is mysteriously linked to Kuzo, allowing him to see through the bird's eyes. Only by using Kuzo will the player be able to gain the necessary information about how to best deal with each group of enemies." Sending Kuzo to a hillside perch may reveal an ambush, throw a switch, or even unlock some slices of the story; he's a good bird.

So next time *Newsweek* sights Mickey Mouse as innovative, do the game industry a favor: Send that cranky, deluded critic a boxed copy of *The Mark of Kri*. **play**

The combat system, regardless of how complicated it sounds, is on the same level as toasting bread. Pick up the control and play—it's that easy.

"OUR COMBAT SYSTEM CAME FROM OUR LOVE OF ARCADE ACTION."

PS2

THE MARK OF KRI

preview

developer: scea san diego publisher: scea available: summer

With rich animations and a very intricate combat system, this could be the next evolution of arcade-style fighting action.

SEGA TREASURES

words brady fiechter

PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

SYSTEM: XBOX
SEGA TEAM: SMILEBIT
AVAILABLE: SEPTEMBER

The compelling trial of a boy and his majestic dragon are not over. But what new wonders can we expect from this fourth game in the Panzer Dragoon series? Take a look at the screenshots for the only immediate answers. Now you know as much about this game as we do, so check back next month for the cornacopia of E3 revelations.

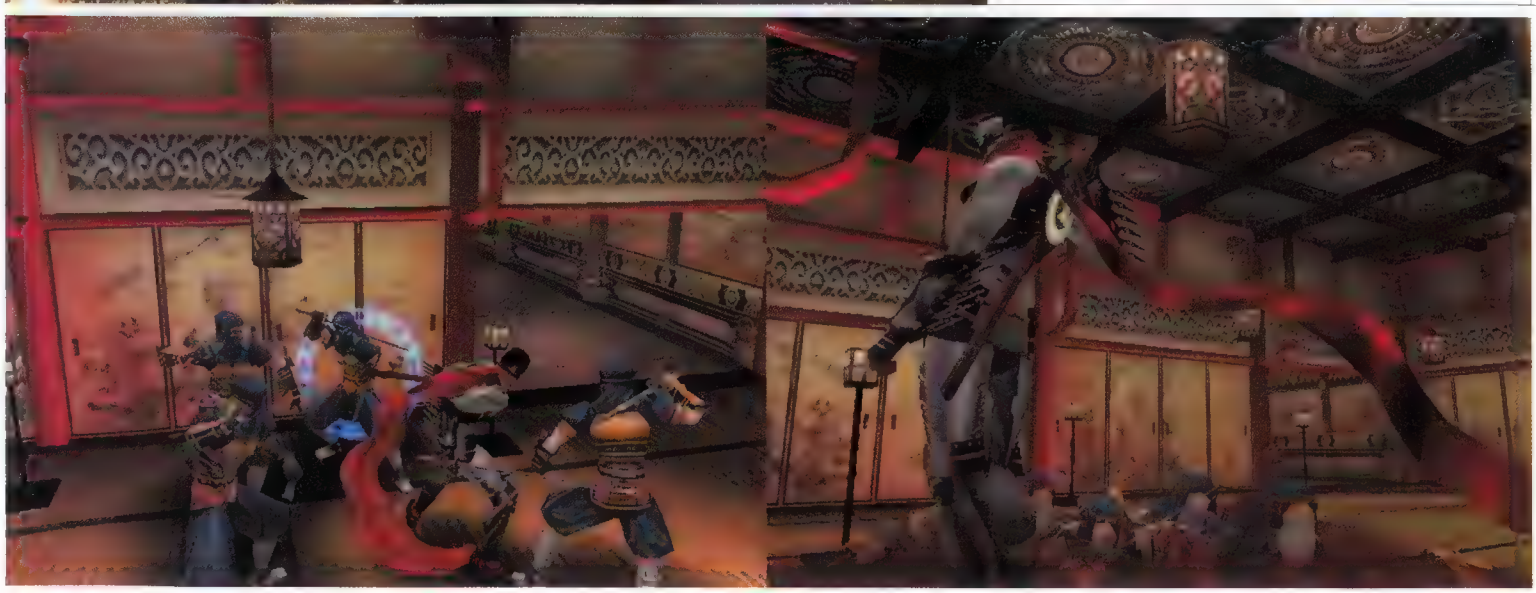
See for yourself what happens when classics are reborn.

Shinobi was a mighty action-platformer on a mighty fine Sega system way back in the day, but you knew that. If you didn't, shame on you and go take a lesson on the great games of Sega's past. And when you're done, get excited along with the rest of us for Shinobi's return.

Created by Overworks—fortunate to have talent who originally dreamed-up the shurikan-tossing ninja warrior on Genesis—this newest, most ambitious Shinobi aims to package much of what made the series an impassioned favorite. It takes place in an earthquake-ravished Tokyo, where the Ninja clan Oboro is being hunted by an enigmatic group. Hotsuma is the leader of the besieged Oboro, forced to defend his clan. He's of course loaded down with shurikans and an array of magical abilities, which give the game the classic Shinobi action spin. Taking advantage of the freedom of the added third dimension, Hotsuma expands the attack with the ability to scale walls and buildings.

SHINOBI

SYSTEM: XBOX
SEGA TEAM: OVERWORKS
AVAILABLE: SEPTEMBER



Death comes swift and often.

TOEJAM & EARL

developer: visual concepts publisher: sega available: august

There seems to be a short list of general rules to sequels: if game sells, sequel must occur immediately. If game kind of sells, sequel must occur immediately. Sequel should be considered even before original game is released. Sequels should eventually multiply into franchise.

Sometimes you get the nasty rule: wait years and then do a sequel—Shinobi, Rygar, Ninja Gaiden, Metroid and far too many other gems lead the pack. Forget the reasons why and just be glad that we're finally getting some familiar names of old coming back to steal the show on this far-different stage. The ten-year-old Toe Jam and Earl is one of the latest stalwarts to come out of a long retirement. This one's on the yearning Xbox, and it looks crazy cool.

A series that's been hibernating this long might tempt developer Visual Concepts to disregard a lot of the original groundwork and run wild with their own ideas, but thankfully this sequel is dropping in tons of recognizable enemies and visual cues to especially delight those of us who were pleasantly freaked by the first adventure on the ancient Genesis.

The game's still all about that effervescent funk and attitude of one Toe Jam and one Big Earl, seekers of the 12 Sacred Albums of Funk. They're joined by "homegirl" Latisha, exploring the Earthlings' world by flying on Icarus Wings, riding the Funk-Mobile, opening presents from Santa Funk, deploying a little Funk-Fu asskicking, rapping and dancing to 40 original R&B flavored tunes.

If the first two games were trippy, lighthearted fun, Toe Jam and Earl III should be nothing short of wrong. Let's hope so.

BRADY FIECHTER

"TOE JAM AND EARL III SHOULD BE NOTHING SHORT OF WRONG."

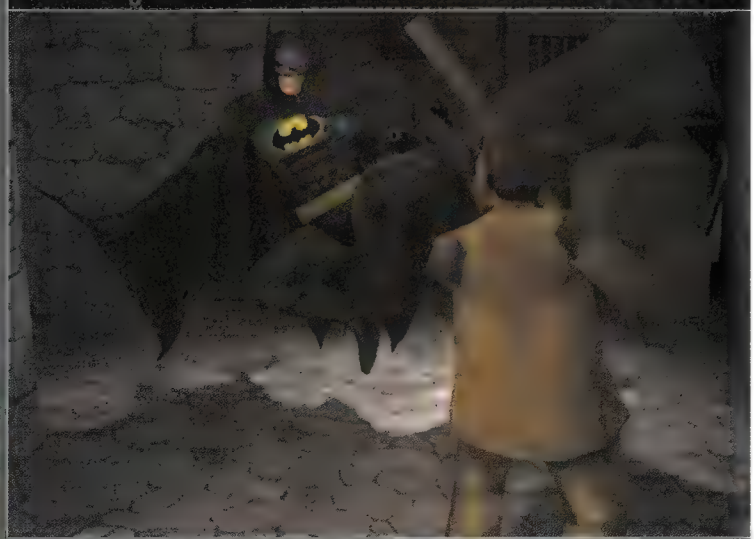
This poor little child needs a good beating device and a lesson on sharing.

BATMAN: DARK TOMORROW

developer: hotgen publisher: kemco available: fall

It's obvious that the Dark Knight is walking on the bleaker side of Gotham City. Veering away from the more animated presence of Batman: Vengeance, a new developer and publisher are attached to Dark Tomorrow, an actionier that sets out to give the franchise a taste of the comic book cowl. The setting is neo-Gothic (a la Tim Burton's take), the character models strive for detail and accuracy, and the DC-penned storyline borders on Frank Miller maturity. As the Caped Crusader, you'll be tossed into Gotham's dismal state—anarchy spreads rampantly, Arkham Asylum is under lockdown, and Police Commissioner Gordon has disappeared. Unfortunately, mum's the word when it comes to the villain roster, but Kemco promises that Batman will utilize both his physical and mental prowess to defeat whoever emerges from the shadows.

JON M GIBSON



Dark and shadowy—exactly what Batman should be.

SIMPSON'S SKATING

developer: fox interactive publisher: ea available: summer

The annual Skate Tour has come to Springfield and everyone in town wants a piece of the whopping $99 dollar purse that's up for grabs. This engine look familiar? If you're a controller-carryin' Simpson's fan, it had better. Now take a moment and imagine how intense it will be shredding the half pipes, ramps, and rails of Springfield (Springfield has half pipes?) as your favorite Simpson's character! Pulling off a *stinkyfish* with Homer, watching Krusty grab major backside air—it brings beer to your eyes. The Simpson's Skateboarding features Freeskate, Skate Fest, Trick Contest, Skillz School and a game of skateboard H-O-R-S-E, along with nine characters from the show, all voiced by their respective humans. You can already hear the *cowabunga*.

NELSON LUI

Next month, shots of the stinkyfish.

A LOT AT STAKE

Buffy doesn't take kindly to vampires, ghouls, freaks, or any variation thereof. If any cross her path they'll almost always end up having the stake.

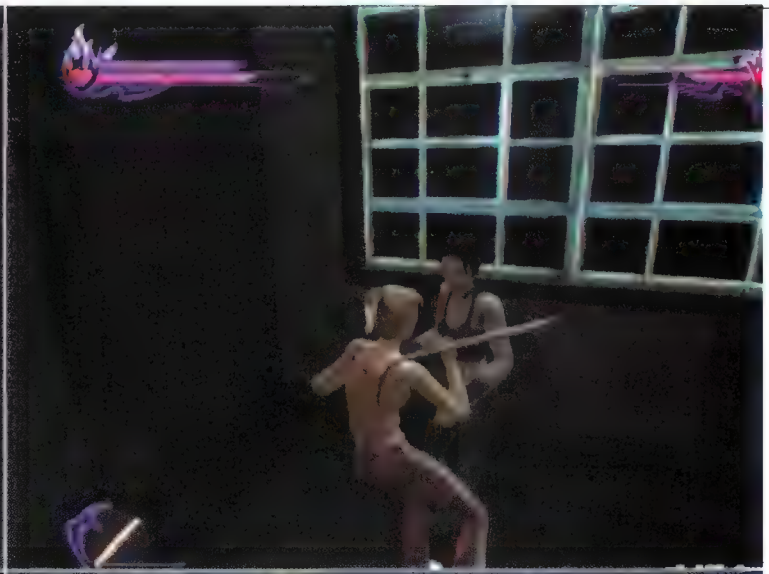
words dave halverson

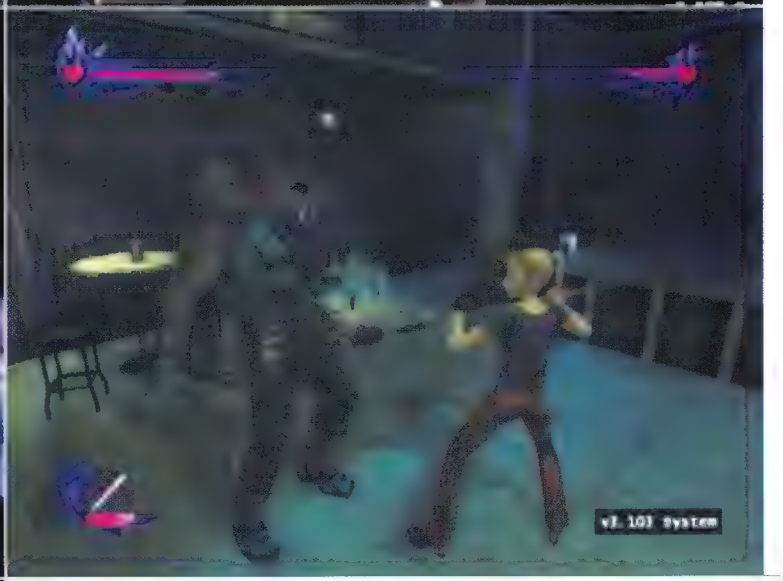
The Buffy faithful—or at least the ones who own an Xbox—are undoubtedly anxiously awaiting the arrival of the first Buffy video game, which joins the ranks of the TV series, comics, lunch pales, books, toy line—basically more merchandise than you can shake a stake at. I'm here to tell you why the rest of us should care, because what may look like a garden-variety arcade-style action-adventure is actually much, much, more. Not only does the game live up to the Buffy namesake, it's a unique cinematic adventure in its own right, laden with elements that set it apart in a category that usually arrives DOA.

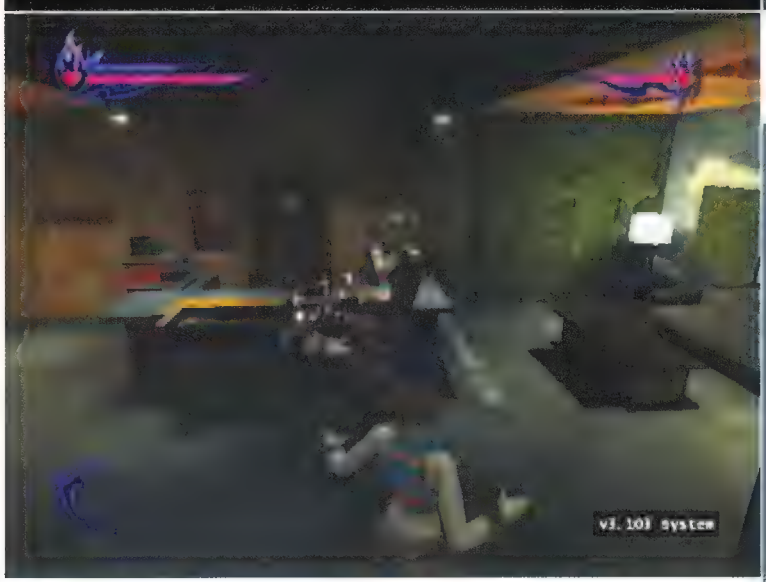
Dispensing with the necessary protocol, in the transition from The WB to UPN, Buffy continues to undergo some weird plot twists. Most notably, of course, she died, only to be resurrected three months later for the new season. Where the comic book series delved into the Scooby gang's life after Buffy, in a much more serious vein than normal, the TV series dove right into the resurrection with more introspective, understated episodes, obviously leading to something quite extraordinary. Beggining development before any of this transpired, the game exudes more of the tongue-in-cheek variety that helped propel Buffy to her current status as the queen of action TV—where killing demons, spirits, and other minions of Hellmouth is as natural as getting dressed in the morning. Just grab the nearest stake and try not to get any on you. With lines like, "You dead folks just aren't that bright, are you?" Buffy's sometimes cruel and always dry sense of humor is in high gear.

As the game begins, with Jiles taking Buffy through her paces, the tone is set. The in-game models are thoroughly impressive—living, dead or otherwise. Not only do Buffy's eyes move independently, but you'll not find a seam on her, and the lip-synching borders on the real deal. To say this game is cinematic would be an understatement.

The action, which thankfully forgoes box puzzles and lever throwing (opting for more realistic progression) is reminiscent of a real-time Resident Evil crossed with Tomb Raider, except that Buffy has something Jill and Laura never had much luck with—friends. Bringing discovered crystals to Willow, for instance, she can increase Buffy's boost strength and slaying power, which she uses for Matrix-style flying kicks and other assorted special moves. In true Slayer fashion, the tools of the trade (which are







One of the game's many great aspects is the realistic-looking animation applied to facial expressions. No matter how ugly, the animation is always tasty.

"THE ENVIRONMENTS ARE SUPERBLY LIT AND DETAILED."

easily accessed by way of a one-button inventory menu) are quickly equipped. Buffy's best friend is, of course, the simple yet effective stake, which can be pretty much anything sharp and made of wood—the end of a shovel, a table leg, whatever's handy. If you find yourself unarmed and there's furniture about, well, you're in luck. Holy water works nice, too, "great for vampire practical jokes–water balloons, squirt guns, screaming and burning–it's a laugh riot"; and the crossbow is cool beans, complete with a nifty zoom. Most of the time, however, you'll find yourself doing what Buffy does best, kicking ass, slayer-style. A punch and a kick here, a roundhouse that separates head from corpse there—The Collective has done a great job with the hand-to-hand aspects of the gameplay.

Perhaps most importantly, though, with millions of fans to appease, Buffy the Vampire Slayer had to be beautiful above all things, and thanks to the power of the Xbox (and The Collective), it is. The environments are superbly lit and detailed, and although bump mapping is used sparingly, pixel shading is not, resulting in textures that border on real. Tying it all together, and one of the most important components in any gothic-themed game, the soundtrack—a mixture of ambient chants, haunting sound effects, and techno rock—blends seamlessly with the action. It's taken a while (good games always do), but it looks like Buffy The Vampire Slayer is getting the game she whole heartedly (hold the stake) deserves

Don't touch that dial; we sat down with the Collective for a bat's eye view of the action...

With such a rabid fan base and widespread appeal, it's fitting that the Buffy universe is the recipient of a thoroughly quality video-game adaption.

With such a rabid fan base, I imagine staying true to the series was paramount in the creation of the game. Are you fans?
[TB] Being true to the Buffy universe and Buffy fans was a mandate for this game. We're all fans here and constantly looked at the product and said, "Does this make sense? Does this fit?" In addition to giving the fan all of the in-jokes and accurately represented locales, we endured to give them more than they've seen before. In the TV show, budgets and time don't allow them to show "what's around the corner" on their sets. We give you what's around the corner and then some.

How long has the game been in development, and how has it changed moving from Dreamcast to Xbox? Did the transition happen early enough for you to make this a genuine Xbox title?
[NH] The game and engine have now been in development for three years. Certainly Xbox wasn't the initial target platform for the game, but we were so ambitious in our planning that the Xbox was the natural game system for us to properly achieve all of our goals. It's the first console powerful enough to run the game we've wanted to make. We've been an Xbox game for over a year now, and in that time the technology and look has been heavily refocused on that platform.

Did you know that Buffy was going to die and be resurrected when you started developing the game? Does it play into the game at all?
[RH] When we began work on the story we didn't know that Buffy was going to die in the show. However, as a subtle acknowledgement of this event, when Buffy is killed in our game, the "Continue" option is called "Resurrect."
Our story is set during season three of the show, when the original Slayer gang is still together and attending Sunnydale High School. Nonetheless, wherever possible, we have tried to foreshadow or hint at events that occur later on in the series, including Willow's addiction to the black arts. We hope that this is one of the subtleties that Buffy fans will love about our game.

The models look amazing and the voice acting is top-notch. Did you have rigid approval standards to adhere to? Did the cast have to approve their respective models? Are these the voices of the actual cast? Isn't this a loaded question?
[CA] Thank you. We did have approval standards to adhere to. We're fans of the series and very passionate about our work, so we naturally did our best to re-create each cast member—including using dialogue recorded by the cast.

Is this game designed solely for the Xbox, or will it eventually see the light of day on other platforms? These textures look awfully rich.
[DH] The current plan is for it to be exclusive to the Xbox. We'd love to give PS2 and GameCube fans a chance to be Buffy and bust some undead chops, but that's up to Fox and EA.
How about the ratings. Is Buffy going for a Teen or Mature ESRB? The new season certainly appears to be aimed at a more mature audience.
[TS] Buffy is rated Teen. Deciding on the rating was a challenge since games are rated differently than film and TV. Initially we set out to make a darker, more mature Buffy, but we also wanted to make sure all the Buffy fans out there could enjoy the game.
[TB] The game's language and themes mimic the show so closely that we'd have to insult the fans with gratuitous blood and nudity to acquire a Mature rating. This does not mean it's watered-down or juvenile; as with the series, there's plenty of content that will appeal to adults as well as teens.

What aspect of the game are you most proud of, and are you happy with the product overall?
[JG] I am biased of course, but the way the character fighting system turned out makes me very proud. Buffy was the perfect opportunity to take a hardcore fighting game, turn it sideways and then raise the bar with full integration into complex adventure-based environments to create free-roaming fighting like no other. This was no small task! To be true to the show, Buffy needed to be able to do blistering combination attacks that can hit multiple enemies at once, bounce them off walls, throw them into smashable objects, pick up weapons to smash them with, kick them onto "environmental stakes" created by the ruckus and, most importantly, stake with conviction at any angle from any position. We have done that and more, but what I am most proud of is the fact the crazy action has been tested and proven accessible to *any* level of player: the system is so intuitive, once you play it you can easily take for granted you are doing nutty things in 3D with ease! I am so happy with this game; it feels and moves like nothing else out there, and just like Buffy herself, the game is fast, gorgeous and at times funny as hell.

"WE'RE FANS OF THE SERIES AND VERY PASSIONATE ABOUT OUR WORK."

[SvK] The interactive music in the game was a major pain to do... But now that it's finished, I'm glad to say that it was so worth it. The music always suits the situation Buffy is in. Also the ambient sound is very dense and real, much more so than other games. Finally, our use of reverb. I tailored different reverbs for all sizes of rooms in our game. If you're in a closet, it sounds like you're in closet; if you're in a sewer, it sounds like you're in a sewer.
[TB] We're really proud of the overall experience to be had in the Buffy game. I believe it is the hybrid product that many others have been trying to do recently. The game seamlessly mixes full-featured 3D combat with action/adventure and stays true to the licensed content, providing the player with a complete package. **play**

XBOX

BUFFY | preview

developer: the collective | publisher: ea | available: june

Buffy lives! What started on Dreamcast but will have its happy ending on Xbox. The Collective have done an amazing job capturing the humor and action of the series in a video game.

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COMIC GENIUS

interview dave halverson

To comic book fans, Joe Madureira needs no introduction. As creator of the blockbuster comic book series "Battle Chasers," which anyone who plays video games will instantly identify with, and as the former "X-Men" artist for Marvel, his resume speaks for itself. TriLunar's other founders, Tim Donley and Greg Peterson, bring similar passion and expertise to the company in their respective fields; in other words, a great new developer has been born. And where there's new life in the business of making games, you'll always find play. Greg and Joe tag-team our queries:

I must say, this is some of the most exciting developer news to come along in some time. I mean, Joe Madureira designing video games? What could better than that? However, bringing those characters to life and making a great game takes a team effort. Who does TriLunar have on board to help realize the vision?
Greg: Right now there is a core group of us working on the concept and planning stages of the project. In addition to Joe and myself, on the executive team we have Tim Donley, our President, Product Development, who came from Black Isle Studios, and Dave O'Connor, our Vice President, Technology, who came from 3DO. We also have a group of the most talented game developers in the industry who are doing a great job bringing Joe's creative vision to virtual reality.

Who will publish your titles, or has that been determined yet? (On a side note: if you're shopping, let us know.)
Greg: We have not started talking to publishers until just recently. We wanted to make sure that we had laid a lot of the groundwork for the project so that we didn't waste anyone's time: we don't like talking to people unless we're very prepared. Several contacts look promising at this point, but we won't know who we're going to partner with until we sign the deal.

I'll ask the obvious question first: Do you have plans to make "Battle Chasers" a video-game franchise? It's a beautiful comic.
Greg: I'll let Joe answer this one.

Joe: Thanks. This is definitely something we've discussed more than a few times early on. I think we'd all love to do it, but for our first game we decided to create something completely new—TriLunar's own property. So while we're excited about the possibility of a Battle Chasers game, our focus is on Dragonkind for the time being.

What prompted you to enter the realm of gaming and when did the actual transition take place?
Joe: I love games with every fiber of my being. I have since I was about seven years old, when on my birthday my parents got me the Atari 2600. Since then, I have owned just about every console in existence, and all of them are still in working condition! Of course, my career in comics was enough to keep me from seriously pursuing a job in the game industry. When I met Tim and Greg, though, and we began to talk seriously about forming a company, I knew it was something I couldn't walk away from. We formed the company in December, 2001, though we had been discussing it back and forth for quite some time.

So Greg, does he promise to hit deadlines? I'm kidding. I'm sure he's happy to be somewhat rid of them for the time being. Are you of the mindset that when it's done, it's done? Quality over quantity—akin to companies like Rare.
Greg: Ha, I can hardly wait for Joe to answer this one. From everything I have seen, the deadlines are as tight—if not tighter. The work is very different than the work Joe did in the past, however. There is more focus on getting tight concepts completed quickly, instead of polishing every last piece of work for release as a piece of comic art. Joe is a perfectionist: he is having fun adapting to the new pace.

Joe: The deadlines are definitely tighter. On the flip side, there's a lot more planning involved. There's a larger team of people working to create a support structure. One team member might pick up the other one's slack. The success of the product is not hinging on just one person as it often does in comics, but on the work of 20 or 30 people. When you play one of our games, you will definitely feel my influence on the game, but the 3D models were not physically built by me, the programming wasn't me, and I didn't play the music that you hear. My role is much more one of guidance, and so the question of hitting deadlines really shifts away from me and onto our team. Everyone we have on board is proven, and insanely dedicated. Best of all, they are experienced at creating successful games, and know what it

MAD!

MAD!

takes to keep everything on schedule. It's an invaluable learning experience for me to work with these guys.

Did you guys jump and then assemble your team, or find the team and then take the plunge?
Greg: It was more of a collaborative undertaking, and kind of a long story. Suffice it to say that Joe wanted to move into the industry for a while, but the timing or the team never seemed right.

Joe: That's right. Over the years I've been approached by game start-up companies, or independent producers looking to pitch a game. None of them ever really screamed "sure-fire-hit," and I wasn't willing to jeopardize my career in comics for something I didn't feel confident about. The concept of a company like TriLunar appealed to me very much even before we started bringing in the awesome talent. Once we laid the groundwork for our company and started fleshing out Dragonkind, I knew there was no turning back! I was hooked.

Does the decision to do it now have anything to do with the current technology available afforded by Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo?
Greg: I don't think so. Technology is always changing. The people are the key. If you have the best people, you can make the best games.

Joe: I agree. If everything happened exactly the same way five years ago, I would have made the switch then. It has little to do with technology for me; it's the good people that are hard to find. Obviously, we are excited about the potential of working on these high-powered consoles, because they remove a lot of creative limitations that existed before. They allow our artists and programmers to really flex their muscles. The next few years are going to be great for gamers, and we're excited to be a part of it all.

Which console is TriLunar most interested in developing for?
Greg: Right now we are focusing on Sony PlayStation 2 and Microsoft Xbox because we need to focus our resources on the platforms that are going to have the greatest impact for us in the short term. However the jury is still out; our VP, technology, wants to do a GameCube version as well.

Joe: Can I just say that I love the GameCube controller to death? GC is a great little system.

Are you leaning towards Teen or M rated games? It seems that Rockstar certainly has laid the foundation if TriLunar want to stay true to Joe's materials.
Greg: We are definitely leaning towards a Teen rating for our first game, primarily because we want to maximize the people who are able to access and enjoy it. I think DMA Designs did a great job with GTA3, but the game required the mature content because the core game idea was all about crime and criminal activities. I like to think our core game idea has a broader audience appeal, though it is hard to argue with GTA3's sales numbers.

What can you tell us about Dragonkind? The models are breathtaking.
Greg: I'll turn it over to Joe for some game story.

Joe: Dragonkind is a 3D action adventure that tells the tale of a young man named Grail. He realizes early on that he can somehow channel the power of dragons through his body. In order to learn more about his newfound abilities and how to use them, Grail must strengthen his bond with the ancient creatures. This is problematic for him, because all his life he's wanted to become a famous dragon slayer like his father. He soon finds himself caught in the struggle between Men and Dragons, forced to play both sides. It's a fantasy world, but it has a very superhero feel in the same way that Battle Chasers did. People should not be expecting a typical D&D setting.

We are very focused on balancing gameplay between the intense action of a classic platformer and the story and characters of an RPG. Basically, we want it to be as easy to pick up and play as possible, but have enough depth and memorable situations to keep you hooked beyond your initial play through.

How long have you been working on it and when do you think it may surface?
Greg: We've been working on the idea since late last year. Game development started early this year (2002). The game will be released in 2004, if not sooner. Some of this depends on the needs of our publisher.

Do you feel the crossover between comic-book aficionados and gamers is substantial?
Joe: Absolutely. I guarantee you that just about everyone buying comics has some game console at home, whether it's a Game Boy or a high-end PC. Obviously the comic industry is much smaller, but it's very much the same demographic. My work in particular is very influenced by manga and video games, and so I think that fans of my work tend to be pretty game savvy.

Would you say your designs are more anime inspired than most?
Joe: I think that's fair to say, yes. When it comes to designing characters, no one can touch the Japanese. I've really tried to study what it is that makes their characters so special. Speaking strictly of video games, it's clear that the most memorable (and successful) game characters from Pac-Man to Pokémon are born in Japan.

Do you watch anime? If so, what's caught your attention lately?
Greg: I don't watch anime, unless you count *Sailor Moon* and *Pokémon*...ha ha. With two small children in the house, the television/VCR is normally hijacked.

Joe: *Spriggan* and the new *Vampire Hunter D* movie were probably the last two films that really impressed me. I'd have to say though that *Jo-Jo's Bizarre Adventure* is my favorite series of all time, if only for the fact that I've seen it a hundred times now, and I still get a thrill every time I watch it. I really hope that it's released on DVD here in the states sometime soon. People need to see this!

What video games (or games) are you currently most impressed with?
Greg: I've got a soft spot for the Final Fantasy series, and FFX has me enthralled. I am also very impressed with Jak and Daxter: it is a very ambitious title. On the PC, Dungeon Siege is a killer title, though I wish they had put a little more time into a game story and non-linearity.

Joe: When one of us gets excited about a game, it's not too long before the bug bites everyone else in the company, so you'll find us playing a lot of the same games. FFX and J&D were probably my most recent favorites, though Devil May Cry and MGS2 blew me away as well. Oh, and Monkey Ball! Who doesn't love Monkey Ball?!

I know it's early to be asking this, but what so far has been your biggest challenge as a new up-and-coming developer?
Greg: Time. Time is never on your side as a start-up. There is a ton of work to get done, and you rarely have adequate resources. You have to be highly disciplined and very organized. I keep repeating "prioritize and focus" to the team.

"IF YOU HAVE THE BEST PEOPLE, YOU CAN MAKE THE BEST GAMES."

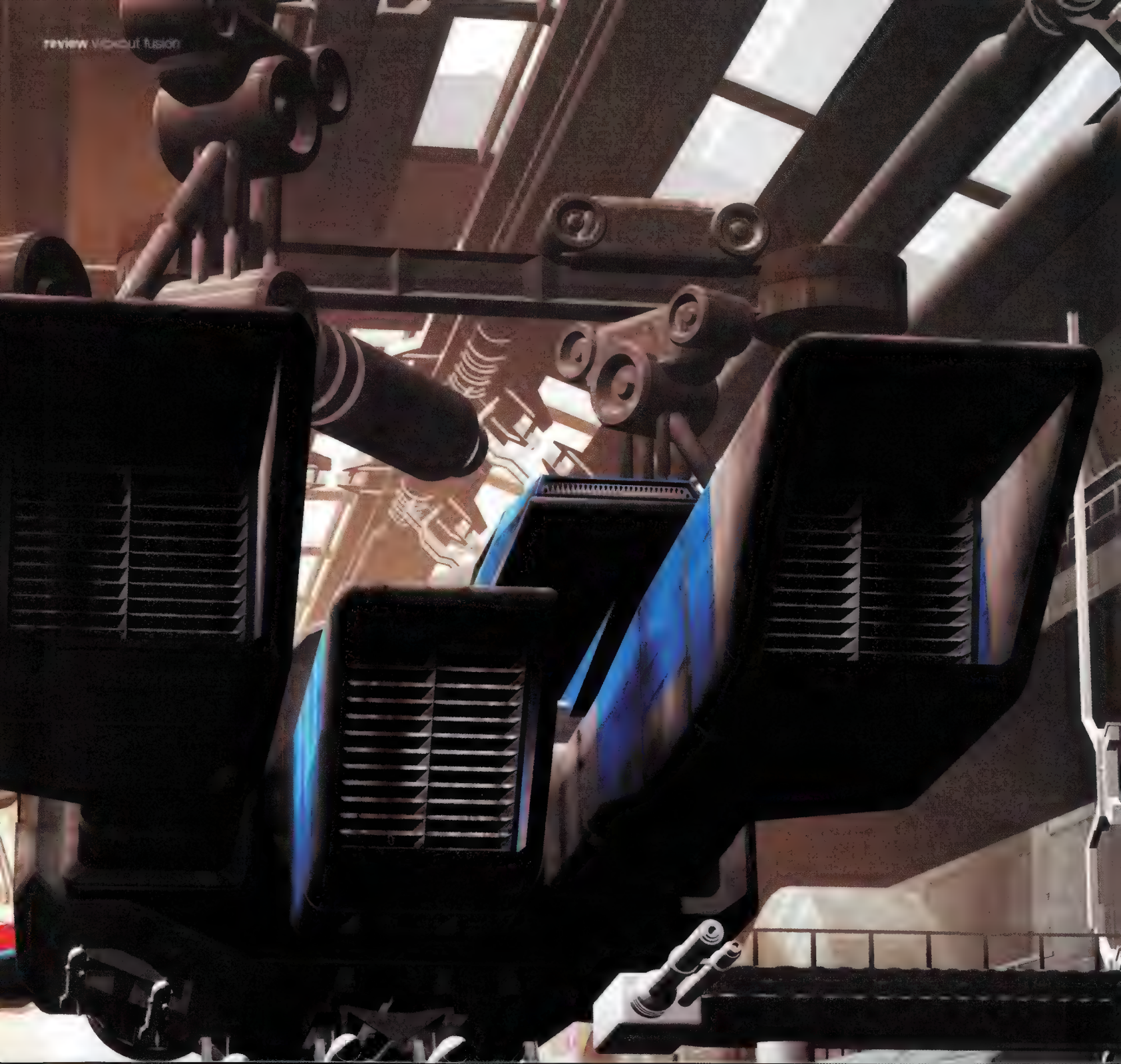
Joe: For me it's been designing for 3D. When you're so used to working in 2D it's easy not to think about how certain things might look at odd angles. We also have to worry about things like animation and timing, things that I never had to think about before. If I design some kind of freaky-looking monster now, I have to seriously think about how it's going to move, what it's attack is going to look like, how it's going to interact with the environment, etc. Let's not even mention poly-count. My new worst enemy. As challenging as it is, I have never had more fun.

Do you have plans to merchandise beyond games and move into TV animation, action figures, etc.? You certainly have an advantage going forward.
Greg: Our games will always have a strong focus on story and character. Those kinds of properties are ready-made for extension into other media and into merchandise. It is something we have definite plans for.

Joe: Whenever I design anything, I try to ask myself, "Could this be a cool toy line? A TV show? Would I want this character's poster on my wall?" If the answer to any of these is "no," it's back to the drawing board. Our games are definitely getting the same treatment, so I agree with Greg. The most successful products are those that can reach into other markets.

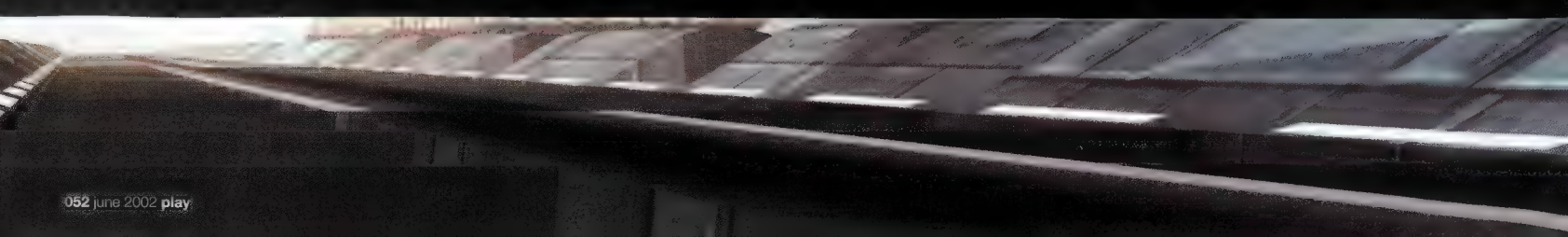
Anything you'd like to say to the world (well, our world at least) to sum up?
Greg: I just wanted to say "hi" to any fans from any of our earlier projects. I hope to see some old faces in the crowd. Welcome aboard for another wild ride!

Joe: I'd love to thank all of the rabid Battle Chasers fans who flood trilunar.com with emails showing their excitement and support for what we're doing. It's very encouraging and, above all, it makes me look good to my new cohorts! Your checks are in the mail! **play**



SUPERSONIC

Who needs ecstasy when the rave is as close as your PS2?



words dave halverson

The year is 2150 and with new advances in technology, the WipEout Anti-Gravity Racing League has undergone some major modifications, emerging as the WipEout 9000 league. Eight new international teams have been assembled to race on all new extreme tracks in seven locations from around the world...

Under the Bam! label, WipEout Fusion has finally arrived stateside, and while it doesn't fly the Designers Republic flag, it's every bit the sequel we expected. Not content with simply amping the fourth installment using the PS2's extra ponies to pump up the visuals–which they have done substantially–SCEE has crafted a much deeper and more immersive racer. WipEout Fusion is less an exercise in memorization and precision than 3 (which demanded an almost inhumane amount of accuracy), spreading the emphasis instead across an array of parameters, like tuning, pilot attributes, skill, and weapons dispersal. Fusion presents an impressive stockpile of arms, including team-specific weapons that you acquire by winning. At first, struggling with your ship in the game's first league, Fusion appears to be no more than a suitably upgraded version of WipEout; you may even be a little disappointed. But in time, as you assail the ranks and cut into the underbelly of WipEout's new digs, you'll barely make time to pee.

The key component is really in building your ship—tuning top speed, thrust, brake force, lateral stability, weapon power, and shield power. What's better is that, not only does your ship actually change form accordingly when you reach certain levels, but when you unlock new teams you can strip your old ship down, pocket all the cash with no penalty for doing so, and apply it all to your new one. Once you've got a few million under your belt, the game begins to unravel at a fever pitch, first with circuits of three, then five, and finally seven. Of course, the

Racing as God intended: fast, mean, and intuitive.

"THE PS2'S EXTRA PONIES PUMP THE VISUALS."

This is a WipEout quite unlike any you've experienced before

deeper you go down the wormhole, the more mind-bending the tracks become, until you're reaching for the barf bag and/or a cigarette, whether you smoke or not. There are a staggering 45 tracks to be had—variations on seven locations, plus challenges.

To give you an idea of the game's physics, the ships in the previous versions had seven anti-gravity parameters—these have 48. The result is a much more realistic feeling of reaction, depending on the pitch and situation you're in. Ships also take cumulative damage that, depending on where you're hit, will affect handling. To support all of this wonderful new technology, the AI has been tweaked accordingly. Rivals, for instance, hold grudges and will single you out when you cross their path. Other drivers, depending on their respective strengths or weaknesses, may block, ram, or make errors. It also matters which pilot you choose. Certain drivers are hated and attract way more trouble than popular pilots. You may not notice all of these nuances at first, but as you progress, you will. With eight teams, 16 pilots and 32 ships all going round and round, techno pumping in the background, you'll be getting into it like never before.

Visually, what seem like suitably upgraded environments at first make way to venues that will turn you into a giddy freak. Dirt in fields kick up realistic dust (unless you happen to be leading), there are now crossroads to deal with, vertical jumps, pads that flip you 180, and open areas with no defined markings contrasted by tight, twisting track imbued with ambient light. From neon-lit nights to blue-blue skies, Fusion is a futuristic marvel. The ships themselves, now more alien then ever, are dually primed. They reflect light, their flaps move with convincing hydraulic motion as you feather the air brakes, and the pyrotechnics blaze. And should you grow tired of the game's six single-player modes, five multiplayer venues await along with 26 weapons to ram up a pal's backside. SCEE really has spared no expense. WipEout Fusion is a triumph, as expected. **play**

PS2

WIPEOUT FUSION

play rating

developer: sony studios liverpool publisher: bam! entertainment available: now

Turn out the lights and unplug the phone. Wipeout is back.

RALLY GREAT

GTC Racing fills a solid slot in the fairly ope rally racing category on PS2

words brady fiechter

The exotic locations throughout Africa are hugely appealing and full of subtle details.

A big part of GTC Africa's enjoyment is zipping through numerous exotic locales in Africa, all carrying a strongly distinct atmosphere; it's been a long time since I've found a traditional racing game's settings so appealing, and GTC does an excellent job of building its ideas into an entertaining arena of offroad competition.

My favorite racing games have always been those that rely on the dynamic of multiterrain hazards and physics. GTC delivers a surprisingly enjoyable racing package, effectively balancing a weighted, genuine feel of Rally driving with a more forgiving, immediately responsive arcade influence. The cars respond to sand, mud, snow and soft dirt with convincing feedback, but the physics aren't so unforgivingly realistic that the game becomes an unnecessary challenge (yet I actually would have preferred a tougher ride; flipping the vehicle is rare and the collisions are too forgiving).

My favorite Rally racer does not make me feel like I'm racing the clock far more than a competitor. What I liked about GTC was the way the pack remained relatively tight, keeping vehicle interaction at a good slope through the fairly long laps. Lead changes are exciting and the tracks are designed to keep the racing moving from wide paths of an open field to the slowing, break-and drift-intensive constriction of trails. Holding the car off the walls and checking your aggression toward the pack is always a part of any racing game, but here it takes on a new motivation: damage is registered and penalizes you at the finish, affecting new team status.

GTC doesn't pack many extras, fulfilling its role as a highly capable racer assembled with surface appeal. There's not a big incentive or desire to return to the game after racing every course. But all the basics are in place, competently attended to, and the visual presence is extremely strong—little details, like an amazing waterfall and dense environment effects, continually impress. Nicely done. **play**

"...A SURPRISINGLY ENJOYABLE RACING PACKAGE."

PS2

GTC AFRICA

play rating

developer: rage publisher: majesco available: now

Balancing ease of play with a solid Rally foundation, GTC Africa leaves a solid mark.

GOLD MEDAL

World War II becomes the thrilling battleground in this sensational FPS

words brady fiechter

Bodies explode, men vomit, bullets assault the sand and water and any confused soldier who happens to be in the way. Giant craters mar the beach from mortar blasts. Desperate screams reveal checkpoints where pinned-down allies require sniper support. Chaos and noise are numbing. Four gunner towers later, it's through the thick of fire, up to the shelter of a steep embankment, through a mine field and into the barbed-wire castle walls.

It's the battle of Normandy, one of the most brutal battles in the history of war, brought to vivid life in one of the most viscerally wound action sequences in a video game. After such a blistering start, there's doubt that Medal of Honor: Frontline can possibly maintain such a forcefull grip.

But it does. We may not be thrown into enemy crossfire that boils the adrenaline with such lacerating force every step of the way, but the game is always finding some way to grab us, to always ratchet up the intensity in some remarkable dimension. Crawling under a jeep for a low, methodical sniper shot to a German skull is just as much of a rush as aggressively dissecting an enemy swarm in the open with a shotgun. The enemy crumples, grabs his wound, spills down the stairs and over rails, runs and ducks and swats. He picks up a body for a shield, reacts to grenades and runs for shelter, shows emotion. He engages with his movements and characteristics as much as his skilled ability to use a weapon.

Because the game is so successful at establishing a mood and authenticity of World War II, a very compelling stage exists to heighten the durable gameplay. There are no weapons of mass destruction, giant bosses to fall or countless guns to upgrade. Your mission is to adopt the conditions of a soldier of the time, dealing with terrible conditions, powerful yet barely functional guns and a recognizable enemy who shoots back without restraint.

Crouch, hide, target, run, moving from one safe point to the next, all with a very calculated strategy: the levels are constructed with an extraordinary placement of spaces and objects, building intricate combat zones that are incredibly engaging: the tight, claustrophobic setting of a train, the winding trails of a forest, the open, crumbling city streets. Every level feels distinct and different, lushly detailed and layered in earthy, rich texture. Where many first-person shooters carry a look of fantasy and synthetic glow, Frontline establishes authenticity and an attention to referenced detailings, tossing us into the gritty trenches of what was a very real, very destructive war.

Some of the best moments in a game stacked with best moments

Get used to these moments: sniping is paramount to success.

"...AN AWESOME TASTE OF THE RAW EMOTION OF WAR."

The absorbing presence of an authentic warground is set. Does this shot impress you as much as it does me?

are when enemy fire spits unexpectedly from the shadows. Snipers are often hidden in dangerous, obscured locations, and you must carefully listen for their position as much as locating them through sight; skilled sniping becomes a crucial technique for survival. And the way a spent weapon takes a painfully cumbersome load-time to get off another round of fire—same goes for the enemy as you stare him down, taking advantage of the temporary vulnerability—is a brilliant way of feeding tension.

The ambitious use of sound, a component inexcusably overlooked too often, has always elevated this series, and here it continues to chill: Germans shout, bullets scream, dogs bark, horns blare. And that music! Fully orchestrated and elegantly scored, understated and evocative, the music does not compete for our attention, does not exist, like in so many games, as a layer outside the images. Instead, it lives as part of what you are experiencing, weaving between the images to tighten their hold.

Medal of Honor: Frontline provides an awesome taste of the raw emotion of war. We don't play Medal of Honor as much as have it happen to us. When we see a soldier through the eye of a rifle, smoking, breathing, relaxing and conversing, asking for a telegram to be sent to his wife—"tell her I love her"—the enemy starts to become something more than a cold target. The missions gather purpose through storytelling, both visual and traditional. Few games bristle with this kind of energy. **play**

PS2

MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE

play rating

developer: ea los angeles publisher: ea available: june

When I played Medal of Honor on PSone, this is exactly what I imagined would result from the designers' vision being freed by the PlayStation 2.

HOW DO I LOOK?

The original master of horror returns with a striking visual reimagining

words brady fechter

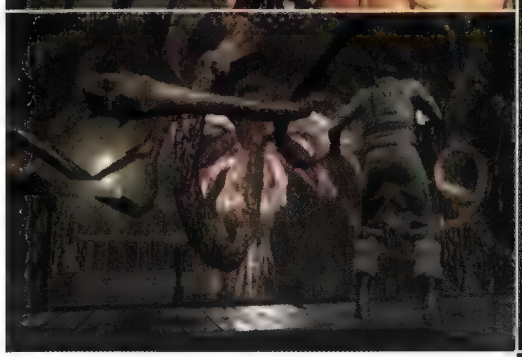
Some video games evoke wonder and awe, like Zelda and Ico. Some games soar with adventure and fantastical grandeur, like Final Fantasy and Chrono Cross. Some games are terrifically atmospheric and full of urgently engaging tasks, turning us into destructive masters of a poignant universe, like Metroid and Castlevania.

All these timeless classics take us to another place and time, inviting us to fully lose ourselves to the fantasy of a completely imagined existence. Few games even hint of this level of greatness—emotional journeys that do more than casually entertain; they enrich our lives.

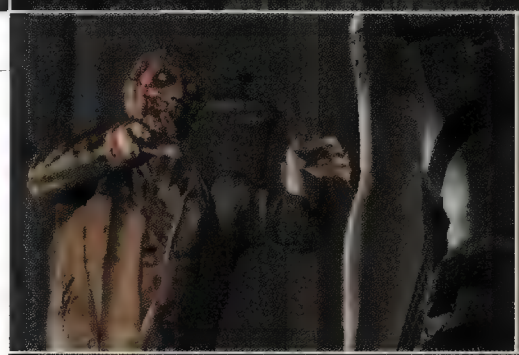
To understand this resonance is to love the distinct artistry that can exist within a game. There are few better examples than the latest Resident Evil, an achievement of astounding impact—beautifully crafted, wondrously imagined, deliriously atmospheric. The game is elegant and exquisitely detailed, lavishly designed and expertly staged, forming a tactile space of dread and decadent mysticism. More than merely entertained observers of a macabre reality, we now inhabit its haunting halls, rooms, and corridors, consumed in its nightmarish vision.

Resident Evil on GameCube feeds off what every good RE game always has: shambling zombies with a big appetite; mutated horrors with a penchant for decapitations; death spilling into every corner; demon hounds with exposed rib cages looking for a human vocal-cord snack; giant spiders and annoying crows and raging fires. Add to this a lot of unlocking, running, shooting grossly satisfying firearms that shed flesh quite well, and, of course, decoding paintings and pushing statues. What separate it from the original are a few added bonuses, rooms, situations, a new boss and restructured puzzles—welcome additions that do perceptively alter the completion of the experience. But the Resident Evil monster still lives with the same heart it's had pumping from the beginning, pulling nearly all

in-game model



Light and shadow are dramatic underpinnings to the mood.

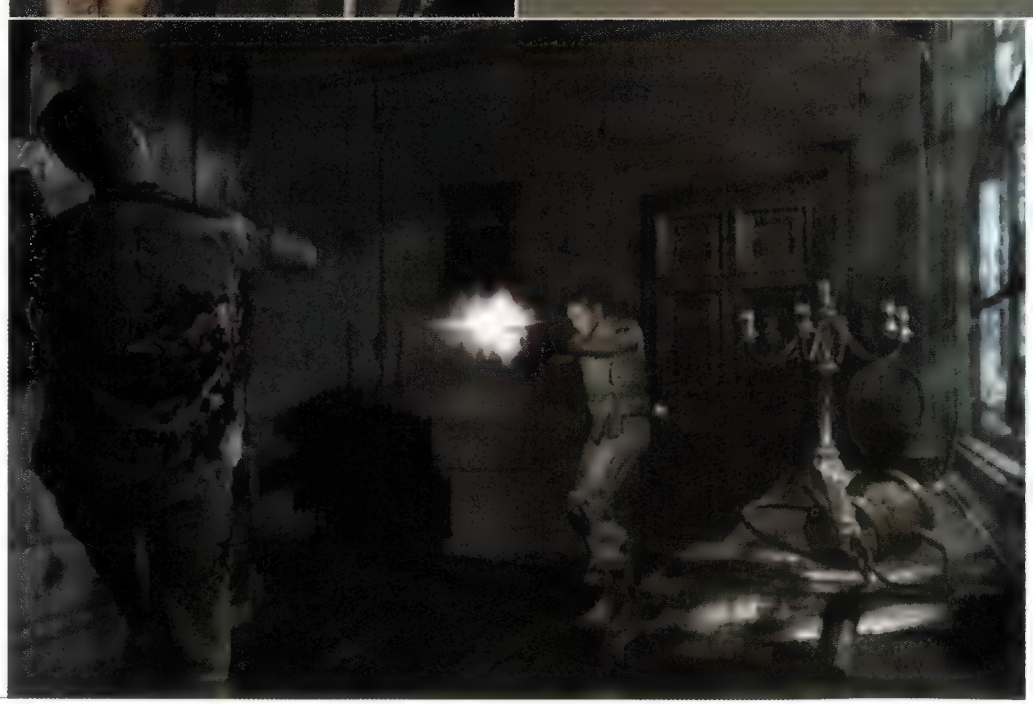


"I'M INTRIGUED BY EVERY QUALITY THAT EXISTS IN THIS GAME."

its added strength from the visual reimagining; the diehards, especially, will experience Resident Evil with a nostalgic awe.

Games can be intimate, personal experiences, not unlike a favorite movie or piece of music. I love shadowy ambience, the way darkness and despair work a compelling spirit. As much as I praise Resident Evil for the way it feels in my hands, I find amazing power in the mood and beauty of its images. There is a detail and complexity existing in the corners and backgrounds that we could never hope to expect before. In Resident Evil, an active world has been conceived—a grand mansion and its decaying surroundings—that previously existed entirely, vividly in the creator's mind. I'm intrigued by every quality that exists in this game, its ability to drown me in its surroundings, and in a large way, this is part of the gameplaying experience. Everything moves so convincingly, and everything we do feels crucial and proper. Light plays off surfaces so perfectly, creating amazing shadows and physical presence. Characters are alive with their extraordinary detail, and every task, every situation, gathers a newfound gravity from the presentation alone. Simply walking into a room, the way the moment is captured in the frame, is relentlessly absorbing.

Resident Evil on PlayStation is one of the great games. Resident Evil on GameCube is amazingly better: an interactive art gallery, an emotional trip, a triumph of gruesome imagination and visual artistry, an intensely immersing battleground of violence and horror—a convincing showcase that a video game can be something extraordinary. **play**



NINTENDO GAMECUBE

RESIDENT EVIL

play rating

developer: capcom publisher: capcom available: now

Resident Evil is an amazing game, an amazing experience, an amazing look into the future possibilities of visual sophistication.

NICE DOG

Heavy Iron breathe new life into a tired toon. If the movie fares as well, this dog may avoid the pound for another 30 years

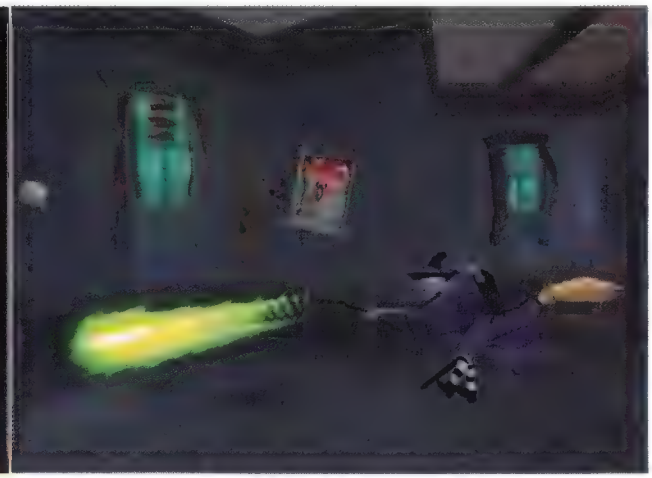
words dave halverson

From Don Knott's mysterious ground keeper to Casey Kasem's unmistakable Shaggy, THQ's Scooby Doo: Night of 100 Frights sounds like the real thing, but, like, who'd have thought it would be a top-notch 3D platformer, Scoob? Zoinks! Apparently good things do come in 30-something-year-old packages.

Heavy Iron Studios has taken the task of breathi ng 3D life into Scooby and the gang very, very seriously, and nailed it perfectly in the process, down to the last Scooby Snack. Building the game on a 3D action-platform framework, they've thrown every last ingredient into the stew: pendulous obstacles, grappling and swinging, conveyor belts, a laundry list of floating platforms, slippery bits, pattern-based spooks (plucked directly from the TV show) and, of course, gizmos—lots and lots of gizmos.

Scooby begins the game with a simple jump, and must find inventions along the way to open locked areas, provided he's munched the requisite amount of Scooby Snacks to gain entry. Springy shoes give Scoob the all-important double jump, a ramming helmet allows him to pierce webs and kill spooks, slippers and a lamp shade provide stealth, galoshes let him traverse sticky tar pits and, well, you get the gist. The further you burrow into the mystery, the more intense the gameplay becomes, as new gadgets produce new wrinkles in the gameplay. Before you know it, you're paw-deep in a beautiful, incredibly fun 3D action platformer—not exactly what I expected from the first Scooby Doo game, but I'll take it, thank you very much. Shaggy shows up every now and then to lend Scoob a hand, throwing him up to reach high

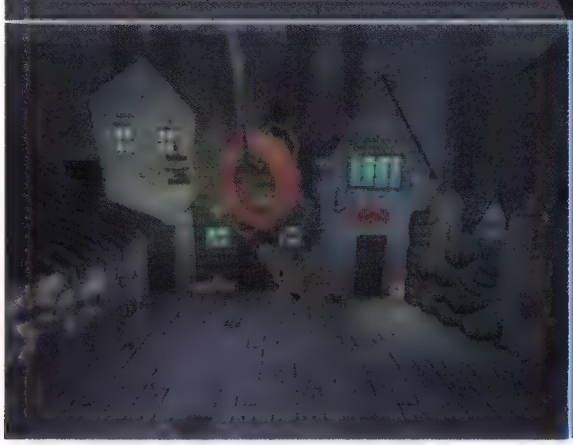
"EVERYTHING IS MODELED TO MATCH THE LOOK OF THE SHOW."



places or providing some much-needed transportation, but most of the time it's just you and Scooby, which in this case is a very good thing. Knowing how difficult it is to build a game around a four-legged creature, Heavy Iron has done an amazing job. The Scooby model is Scooby, with animation perfectly tailored for gameplay. The entire game looks, feels, smells, and sounds better then ever, successfully plucked from the '60s for its 21st-century overhaul. From Scooby's trademark gallop to the hokey canned laughter, you are playing the TV show in 3D.

Getting the whole gang into the act, the central spook, The Mastermind, kidnaps Velma, Freddie, Daphne, and her friend Holly, and brings back all of the gang's old foes to cover his tracks, leaving Scooby and Shaggy to free them one at a time and solve the mystery. The game branches out from a central haunted mansion, Mystic Manor, and covers every imaginable type of terrain one might find surrounding a haunted mansion. The graphics couldn't be better. Everything is modeled to match the look of the show, then bathed in the same color palette and given life through hardware.

I'm the first one to admit that most American cartoons are sparsely animated cheese factories, but they can live again through movies and video games, provided care is taken in the process. Whether the movie will fare as well as the game remains to be seen. THQ has certainly done their part in throwing this dog a bone (although Scooby Doo is still a $70-million-a-year franchise), let's hope Warner Bros. follows suit so that Heavy Iron can give us a sequel. Maybe if they'd have made a Josie and the Pussycats game…nah. **play**



With no doggy-door in sight, Scooby looks for a place to relieve himself.

PS2

SCOOBY DOO: NIGHT OF 100 FRIGHTS

play rating

available: now

pounce, but Night of 100 Frights is good stuff.

SPIDER-MAN, A MARVEL

Treyarch makes Spidey a marvelous movie game

words dave halverson

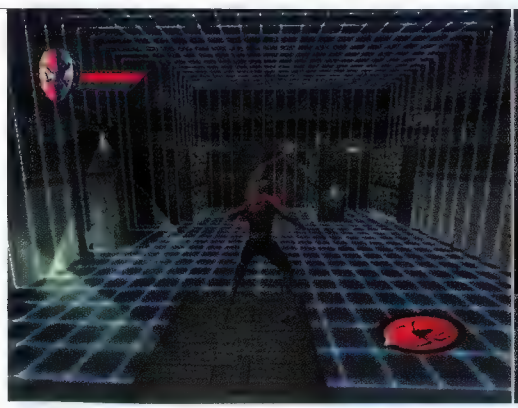
After a barrage of polished screen shots and movie-fueled hype, Spider-Man has finally landed on a console near you. So is it the mother of all movie games it's been billed as, or should you reach for the Raid? A big fan of Treyarch, I'm a bit annoyed that their time in the limelight is always the result of their more formulaic efforts, but they've certainly succeeded again, this time delivering a great game of Spider-Man. With lush visuals, easy-to-grasp, hard-to-master gameplay and a Hollywood soundtrack in tow, Spider-Man is indeed the quintessential movie game. A quality movie game is one that looks the part (which this definitely does) and can be played by anyone, from beginner on up, which they most certainly can here. Often times, however, this unholy union, and the inherent restrictions that apply (creating a scripted game based on a fleshed-out character and parameters) equate to across-the-board mediocrity. Treyarch avoid this stigma by allowing the player to plunge through arcade-style or, on more difficult settings, use more stealth and cunning. Playing on easy, you can step into a massive blue question mark midway through the game to trigger instruction (make that cheesy instruction), but in Super Hero mode, you wouldn't have the time, even if you could.

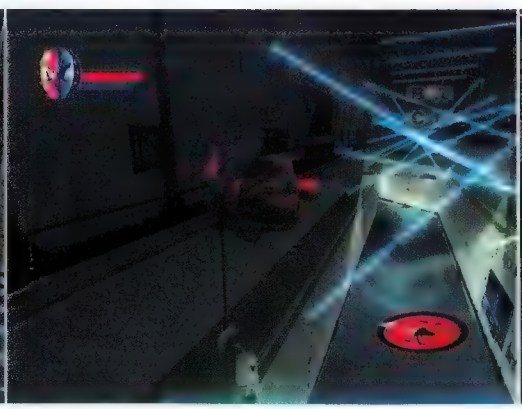
The game unfolds pretty much by the numbers, in sporadic bursts a few minutes at a time, never really immersing the player in any particular style or rhythm. But that's the nature of the design—a chain of events strung together by impressive CG. We get a bit of stealth (although the structure doesn't support as well as I'd hope), first-rate arcade fighting, protection scenarios, and the usual mission ops, but the real money in any Spider-Man game lies in the web slinging, which Treyarch has set to auto, leaving the player to chase and shoot web. These bits of gameplay are the closest any of us will ever come to feeling what it's like to be Spider-Man. It's also the closest any of us will get to Kirsten Dunst (unless you go to Sony parties). Some of the game's other banner moments come doing what Spider-Man does best—avoiding detection by creeping along walls and ceilings. Although much of the time you're too confined to really get into it (the camera isn't the greatest in tight spaces), Treyarch makes it interesting through clever play mechanics and stellar obstacles, like dancing infrared beams of light.

Of course, there's no denying the eye candy at work here. The stereotypical thugs underwhelm, as they almost always do, but the cityscapes look absolutely gorgeous, and the Spider-Man model is a true marvel. I've seen these interiors before in Max Steel for Dreamcast, but that's a good thing; I'm also one of few who'll make that distinction, far less care. Spider-Man isn't an epic along the lines of a Tomb Raider or Metal Gear, but it more than succeeds as a companion piece to the film. If every video-game adaptation played more like Spider-Man, they may not carry the stigma from which they are finally breaking free. **play**

"THERE'S NO DENYING THE EYE CANDY AT WORK HERE."

As cool as the web slinging is, I can't help but wonder exactly what he's latching onto...





NINTENDO GAMECUBE PS2 XBOX

SPIDER-MAN **play** rating

developer: treyarch publisher: activision available: now

See the movie, watch the commercials, buy the toys, read the comic, and if you have any money left, play the game.

DEUS EX: THE CONSPIRACY

developer: ion storm publisher: eidos available: now

Harvested from the critically embraced PC version of the two-year-old Deus Ex: The Conspiracy, this underachieving PlayStation 2 first-person adventure creaks with age. But there's still enough juice in these solid veins—the game looks, plays, and sounds just good enough.

And the complex story actually does play a large role in building the gameplay whole, turning Deus Ex into a dialogue-driven adventure as much as a tense shooter. RPG elements also play a part, allowing you to choose what enhancements and weapon detailing to offer your agent. You may find a number of solutions to one problem: blow the lock, pick the lock, decode the lock? It all depends on your character arc.

Deus Ex will inevitably inspire a sequel, which would be welcome (and a movie is coming). It can take its excellent concept and properly strengthen it with an engine overhaul.

BRADY FIECHTER

play rating ●●●●●

When firearms aren't available, riot sticks work just fine.

RAYMAN ARENA

developer: ubi soft publisher: ubi soft available: now

Rayman Arena should have been Rayman Racing, a multiplayer game with nothing but characters from the fertile Rayman universe running through obstacle courses that contain explosions, energy beams, blow fire, flow with lava, churn, turn and disintegrate. It would be lots of fun with friends, a snooze by yourself, and contain a pleasant aesthetic. It would be Rayman Arena, minus those deflated arena battles that break into the racing fun (gotta work on that sloppy control).

I liked Rayman Arena, finding its charm and surface appeal a welcome distraction. The racing is a blast for a few quick rounds, and the platforming elements are always a welcome addition. But it's not the kind of party game that lasts well past the immediate draw.

BRADY FIECHTER

play rating ●●●●●

Of course, grab a friend and the game finds its proper legs.

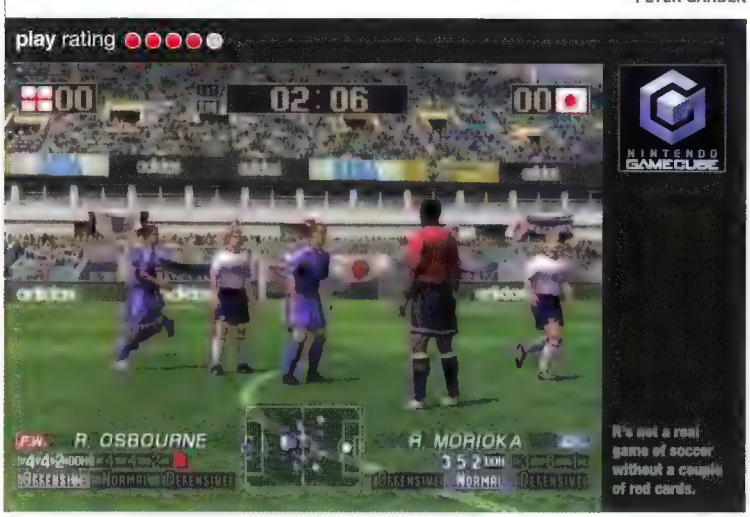
VIRTUA STRIKER 2002

developer: amusement vision publisher: sega available: now

Sega's Virtua Striker series has been a favorite of Japanese arcades for many years. Its super fast, super simple play made it a perfect quick fix of soccer. The experience didn't hold up so well at home, as the Dreamcast version of Virtua Striker 2 was just a little too basic for its own good. It was an empty thrill next to the comparative depth of EA's FIFA series and Konami's awesome Japan-only Winning Eleven series. But with Virtua Striker 2002 on Gamecube, the series has taken a step up on console. First of all, it's gorgeous, brighter and cleaner than FIFA, and the lightening fast play feels much better than it did in Virtua Striker 2. It's still far from reality, in that the ball is changing hands (or is that feet) literally every second. You don't so much pass the ball around as you perpetually steal it down the field. But it is fun, and the inclusion of a general manager mode gives the game some much needed depth. If Sega Soccer Slam is too wild for you, then try Virtua Striker 2002 .

PETER GARDEN

play rating ●●●●●



It's not a real game of soccer without a couple of red cards.

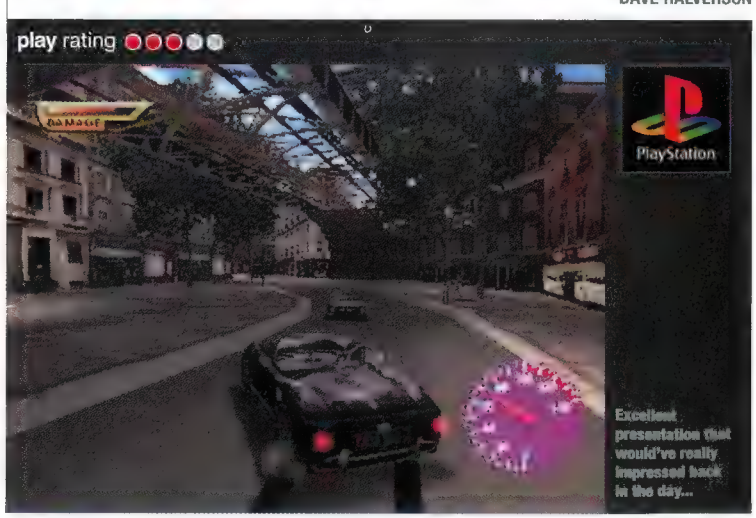
THE ITALIAN JOB

developer: pixelogic publisher: take-two interactive available: now

10 bucks? Done and dusted. A Brit excursion so steeped in the native tongue you'll speak like a young Michael Caine (who sounds surprisingly like Terence and Phillip) long after you put down the controller, Italian Job is patterned after the '60s heist flick, in which Caine, fresh out of the can, attempts the heist of a lifetime, which involves a whole mess of mini-Coopers zipping around london like a Benny Hill (who's actually in the movie) sketch on crack. As sad as it is witnessing the sorry state of 3D we endured to arrive at this point, Italian Job is a great PS game, along the lines of Driver, only more, shall we say, International. Plus, if you're looking to take a couple of big birds (plus-sized women) to the looney bin (your mate's house) to coax him into the next jolly (mission), it's the only game in town.

DAVE HALVERSON

play rating ●●●●●



Excellent presentation that would've really impressed back in the day...

SPECIAL K

Life is anything but a grind for professor K. Pull up a polygon and see what the king of scratch has to say about life in the big city...

interview dave halverson

So, Professor K, what's it like living in a polygonal city?
I know how to keep it real, baby. As long as I can spoon out the word on the street, it's all good. There will always be people trying to shut you down and crush your freedom. So we keep on spreadin' our style and expressing ourselves as a message to everyone in Tokyo.

Do you prefer your ladies cel-shaded or texture mapped?
Oh, definitely cel-shaded. Is there any other way? Have you seen Gum, Cube, Boogie, and all the rest of the GG ladies? C'mon now! Those are some fine looking women. Steer clear of those Love Shockers, though. They're a heart attack on skates.

You're looking good on Xbox—crazy jester hair and all. Are you happy with your new model?
I've gotta keep my look fresh. A man like me needs to reflect the style of the street, and at times set the standard. I wouldn't look like this if I wasn't happy with it.

The girls are looking better too. You must be down with that.
Like I said before, we've got some fine-looking ladies in our crew. But I've got other cuties on the side. I don't go fishing in my own bathtub, if you know what I'm saying.

If you're from Japan, where'd you pick up the crazy lingo?
My speech reflects the word on the street, man. I can switch up my style in a nanosecond in order to communicate the latest news. My lingo flip-flops faster than a politician on the witness stand.

From the inside looking out, what are your initial thoughts on

the organic world?
You guys have got some pretty boring character designs. I feel sorry for you, man.

How do you get your intel? Seems like you know what's happening every minute of the day.
If I told you that, what would stop you from setting up a competing radio station? C'mon man. I'm not the keeper of the street info for nothin'!
Who's the baddest gang in Tokyo?
Who do you think? The GGs, of course. They kick the Rokkaku clowns in the pants, paint the town, trick off everything in site, and still come home in time for milk and cookies.

"MY LINGO FLIP FLOPS FASTER THAN A POLITICIAN ON THE WITNESS STAND."

-Professor K

And the wimpiest?
Anyone who's not with the GGs.

Who's the coolest guy and girl in GG (besides Gum, of course)?
You're asking me to play favorites now? Those kids are all cool. They've each got their own style, skills, and attitude. Just when you think you know all there is to know about one of them—BAM! They come back with a sick trick that makes your brain bleed just trying to contemplate what they've done. Which one of your eyes do you like best?

What's the deal with Rokaku Gouji?
He's living on borrowed time. Anyone who would try to shut down the city like he is has got to have problems. He's motivated by greed and a thirst for power. It's almost scary to think of what the city would be like under his control. That's why we're taking him out.

What about Hayashi? What's his deal?
Now there's a man with severe disorders. I think he was dropped on his head as a baby. And then again as a child, and perhaps a few times as an adult as well. Know what I'm sayin'?
What are the top-five tunes on the pirate radio station JSR? (Say "Birthday Cake" or die.)
Again with the choices? Music is a part of my soul, as it is with the kids on the street. All the tunes have a purpose, a specific part to play in the grand orchestration that is life. The songs I play are more than just music to groove to, they are words and sounds to live by.

How would you classify those funky grooves?
That's just it, man. You can't classify them.
What do you think about the fact that there's a Crazy Taxi film in the works (which has no distinguishable characters) and not a Jet Set film, from a game which is filled with colorful (to say the least) personalities?
All I know is that we're like a living movie every day. Drama, action, intrigue, and art all rolled into one experience. That's better than a movie, man, that's real life. As for Hollywood, if they want to try to capture some of that on celluloid, they can try. And anyway, who says there's not a JSRF movie in development, too?

If there was Jet Set movie, who would you cast as yourself?
Who's the smartest, best-looking, coolest, hippest, grooviest actor out there? Take him, clone him, multiply the two clones together, and then you've got someone who might be able to play me in a movie.

And finally, do you understand the concept of love?
If you have to ask me that, you must not understand love or DJ Professor K, 'cause the two phrases are synonymous, man. **play**

DOGSHOW!

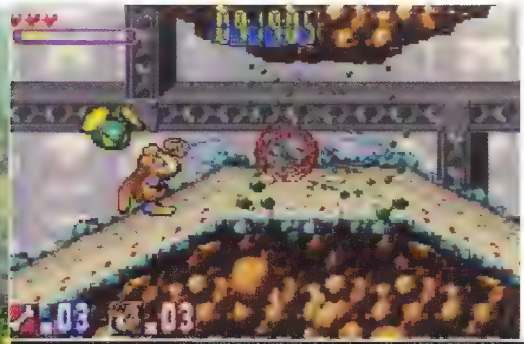
Hudson blesses the Game Boy Advance with more charming characters and classic 2D action

words dave halverson

While it's not as manic as Gunstar Heroes or as fast as Sonic, Hudson's Blender Bros. is quality old-school 2D cut from the same cloth, and that is a very good thing. Slightly reminiscent of Vic Tokai's Socket for Genesis (you played it, right?), Blender Bros. spans seven planets, each with four worlds to explore—including a boss and the odd mode-7 challenge. You play as Blender, which Hudson refers to as a "dog animalman," your basic walking super-dog with irregularly long dangerous ears–Wonderdog and Underdog beware. In each side-scrolling two-deep level (Blender can move in and out between backgrounds at designated points), you'll find the usual 2D suspects—baddies, grappling lines, ropes, spiked pits, switches, and platforms galore—but also hidden within, Mini Bros.—funky little alien orbs that harness unique abilities to aid Blender on his quest.

As you may have guessed, finding and implementing the proper Mini Bros. for each area is often the key to success. Neon, for instance, lights your way through dark passages, so no Neon, no passy-passy. Other Mini Bros. replenish health, freeze enemies, float, form protective shields, and so on. Once you've collected enough bones—Blender's tasty treat for disposing of enemies—you can take your Mini Bros. into the music room at Cosmo Heaven, your home base, and play them the music you've bought, choosing

"LONG-TERM VALUE LIES IN EXPLORING NEW AREAS AS YOU AMASS AND EVOLVE MINI BROS."



Left: Blender Bros. move within parallel side-scrolling backgrounds.

between rock, classical, or reggae. Select the right tune and your selected Mini Bros. will evolve. Taking it a step further—and I'd really like to meet the people who do this—if you have a friend with Blender Bros. and he's found a Mini Bros. you haven't, and you've just gotta have it, you can link up and swap. If you only have one cart, you can play one of BB's three mini-games, but no trading. Since finding all of the Mini Bros. provides the game's replay value, I don't recommend trading, but, like I said, if you're into swapping MB's, let me know so I can alert the proper authorities.

Although some of the bosses are on the tough side, Blender Bros. is a pretty easy game to beat, so the fun and long-term value lies in exploring new areas as you amass and evolve Mini Bros. All totaled, much like Pinobee, there's plenty of game to be had, provided you don't mind replaying levels, which, in this case, you shouldn't. Blender Bros. is a gorgeous-looking game, and the music is of the classic Japanese action-game variety, which I hear far too little of these days.

There's certainly a pile of 2D action games out there for the GBA right now, but many of them are just that. If nothing else, Blender Bros. is unique, but I think you'll find it utterly engaging as well. **play**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

BLENDER BROS.

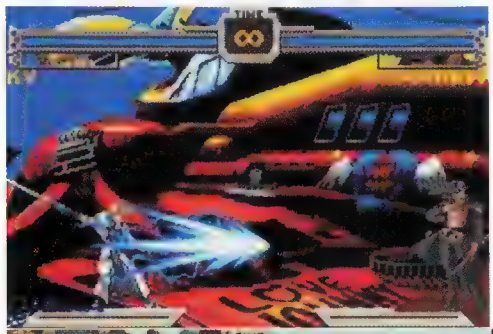
play rating ●●●●●

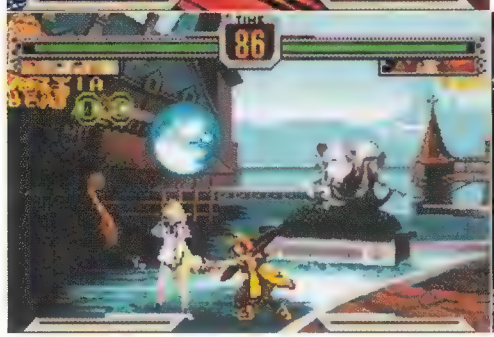
Hudson brings their quirky Japanese magic to the GBA once again in a game about mutant animals and the gizmos that help them

GO TO HELL

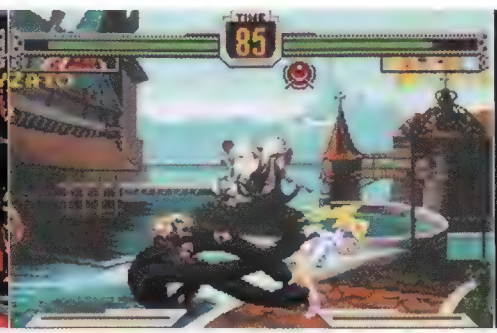
The battle between heaven and hell makes its way to the Game Boy Advance

words dave halverson





Sometimes good things come in small packages. Of course, sometimes you can't see them because your screen is so dark, but nevertheless, Guilty Gear X is worth finding some light for. Prerequisite light dig out of the way, squeezing this highly animated, skillfully drawn duel between heaven and hell into a small space couldn't have been an easy task, so Arc System Works is to be commended. But don't expect the arcade, Dreamcast, or soon-to-arrive PS2 version of the game. Guilty Gear does take a few hits in the transition, even if it is one of the best portable fighting games around. The characters are surprisingly well animated and detailed, but the backgrounds are sadly flat, devoid of any line scrolling or parallax. This was inexcusable on 16-bit, so it's curious as to why ASW couldn't make it happen on the more powerful GBA. But what it lacks in backgrounds—which seems less an issue on the small screen anyway—it more than makes up for in character design and overall presentation. All 14 fighters are superbly designed, in case you hadn't noticed, and the game's simple Street Fighter-style control scheme and combos adapt almost too easily to the Advance's ergonomics. Aside from the arcade mode, the game supports link play, and a three-on-three team battle mode. You can also recolor your fighters and their pyrotechnics; I believe that's a first. The music, on the other hand, didn't fare nearly as well. It's not horrible, but it's certainly not up to par, given the GBA's capabilities. Guilty Gear, however, has always been about these characters and this awesome universe, and all have arrived intact. So enjoy a great showtime! **play**



Did you ever think you'd see 2D fighting as luscious as this on a handheld?

"ALL 14 CHARACTERS ARE SUPERBLY DESIGNED, IN CASE YOU HADN'T NOTICED."

GAME BOY ADVANCE

GUILTY GEAR X ADVANCE EDITION

CIRCUS FREAK

David Siller's 2D brainchild is flying high again on the Game Boy Advance

words dave halverson

One of the Game Boy Advance's many gifts is that it has become the receptacle for a 16-bit gaming revival of sorts. From Super Mario to Ghouls 'n Ghosts, a new generation of gamers are experiencing what got us here in the first place, and those of us who have crossed over can now hold the power of old in the palms of our hands. Better yet, when these beauties come rolling back into town, they often do so with any residual kinks ironed out. In Aero the Acrobat's case (one of Dave Siller's early contributions to 2D gaming), the game has been tamed quite a bit, and gone from very hard to doable, provided you're a proficient platformer. So much of the gameplay in Aero is performed over spikes and perilous situations that, unless you're predisposed to meticulous 2D antics, you'll find yourself at the Game Over screen often. Combing the confines and outer regions of the circus from hell, Aero must blast out of a cannon, ride the high wire, latch onto and launch from a regalia of gizmos, and hover and spin his way through a series brain-bending 2D mazes. The game's vast vertical layers of armature are laden with clowns and carney freaks, all placed in calculated fashion, posing a major challenge rather then the usual algorithms of mindless drones. In other words, the game is tuned precisely, forcing the player to plug in or pay the price.

Visually, Aero really holds up. Where he appeared small on the big screen, on the GBA he looks better than ever, as does the whole game, thanks to a very smart port by Atomic Planet. By adding new animations, slight tweaks, and adding definition in certain areas, they've improved what was already excellent gameplay substantially. With any luck, the success of Aero's GBA debut will fuel the character's evolution into 3D. Then all Dave will need is enough time off from Maximo to do it. **play**

Warning: Serious platforming abounds-Definitely try this at home.

"A NEW GENERATION OF GAMERS ARE EXPERIENCING WHAT GOT US HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE."

GAME BOY ADVANCE

AERO THE ACROBAT

play rating

developer: atomic planet publisher: metro 3d available: now

Aero looks better than ever on the small screen, and this gameplay never gets old. Perhaps this will lead to the bats first flight in 3D.

ZERO EFFECT

Capcom makes its first MegaMan action game for the GBA. Guess how it turned out

words mutsumi yasuda

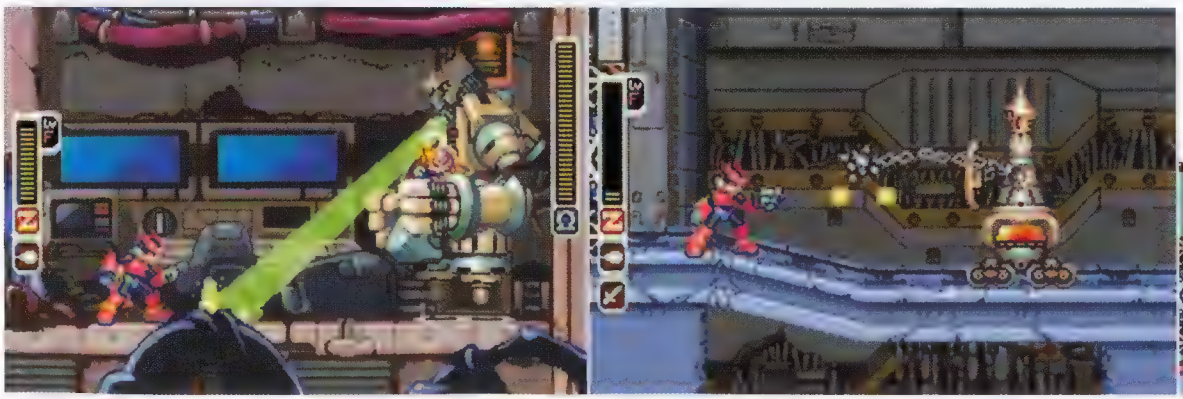
"MEGAMAN GAMES ARE ALWAYS GOOD, EVEN AS THEY ARE ALWAYS THE SAME."

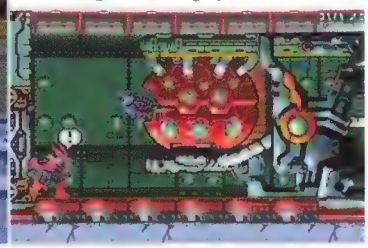
Capcom's MegaMan factory is still running full bore. I remember playing the first MegaMan on NES, and can you believe it, the games are still coming. This latest is MegaMan Zero on GBA, and it is of course looking rather grand.

This is the first proper MegaMan game on the system, following the RPG-tinted MegaMan Battle Network. Visually, this one belongs to the "X" family of games, and Capcom is bringing their depth of 2D knowledge to the finest 2D system since Sega Saturn. In short, this is an awesome-looking game, with beautiful colors and extremely well-animated sprites.

Ah, but what of the gameplay? Are you nuts? This is a MegaMan game. If you don't know what to expect, then I wonder how you happened to find this magazine in your hands. But there is a twist, and that is that you don't even play as MegaMan. Here you play as Zero, a character first introduced in MegaMan X. His claim to fame is a flowing blond ponytail and a slashing green light sabre. This time around, he is a little more elaborately armed, and is able to switch instantly between his powerful blade and more conventional ranged weapons, just like MegaMan.

This series is a staple of the video-game landscape, and as long as Capcom keeps pumping them out, I'll keep playing them. They're always good, even as they are always the same. Some things just never get old. **play**





Not since the Saturn have we been blessed with such great 2D imagery.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

MEGAMAN ZERO | preview

developer: capcom | publisher: capcom | available: august

The MegaMan series soldiers on in this wonderful-looking Game Boy Advance game starring Zero. Will this series ever end? I'm in no hurry for it to

HERDY GERDY

Take a walk in Herdy's shoes

words dave halverson

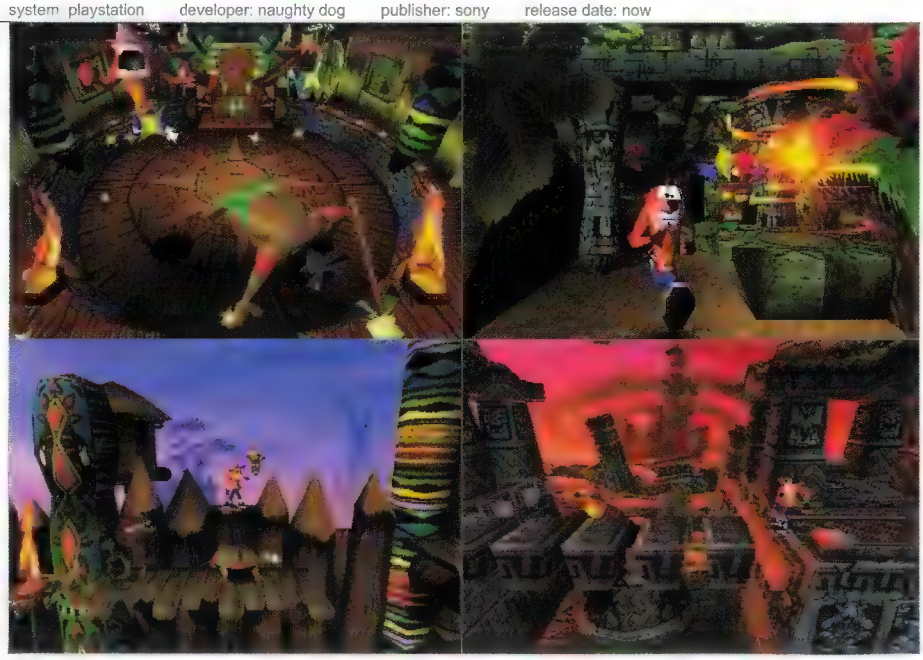
Once in awhile (more often than I'd like to see), games are misrepresented for the wrong reasons. Regarding framerate issues, for instance, if a game chugs with nothing up on screen, that's bad, especially if it's the type of game that really relies on a consistent framerate (fps, racing, etc.). But when you're essentially spinning entire regions, as you are in Herdy Gerdy, a little chug should be the least of your worries. Beyond what you've seen and read, having now thoroughly covered every inch of the game, I'm more convinced then ever that if the idea of being immersed in a world filled with wonder intrigues you, Herdy Gerdy should be your next purchase. This is a world alive with fantastic critters both tame and wild, topped off by genius stealth that draws you into its wondrous last bits almost intuitively. It's innovative, endlessly charming and wholly engulfing. Six years in the making, the Gerdy framework is just beyond the PS2's technology, but that point is greatly outweighed by the grandeur and scope of the adventure.

CRASH

The international sensation that swept 3 Nations is still top dog

system: playstation developer: naughty dog publisher: sony release date: now

words dave halverson



It may seem odd to regard a PS game as retro, but when you think about it, Crash Bandicoot represents, among other things, the birth of the modern platformer. At the time, 1995, the graphics were simply unbelievable, so much so that they still elicit oohs and ahs taking into consideration the platform they're riding on. Coupled with the pinnacle of simple jump and dodge gameplay mechanics, Crash's sophistication bridges the hardware gap, putting it in the company of games like Super Metroid, Zelda: A Link to the Past, Castlevania: Symphony of the Night and Gunstar Heroes. One must also take into account that since ND didn't know that Crash was going to be an international blockbuster, they tuned it for hardcore gamers, which is why they ultimately broke the mold. Crash had no double jump, no slide, no creeping move, nothing. He jumped and rode a pig. By designing a brilliant game around those simple aesthetics Naughty Dog wrote a new page into gaming history. Hard to believe that was almost seven years ago. **play**

"...THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN PLATFORMER."

GUNGRAVE

The makers of Gunvalkyrie turn their sights on the PS2 with this anime-themed shooter

developer: smilebit
publisher: sega
available: summer

Among Sega's blistering E3 lineup (which includes sequels to Panzer Dragoon, Shinobi, Toe Jam and Earl, and Crazy Taxi), the new software giant will also unveil Gungrave the new action-shooter co-developed by Red Company and Smilebit that features character designs by renowned TriGun creator Yasuhiro Nightow. TriGun fans will draw an instant comparison between the game's massive gun and a certain chaplin's mighty cross. For the rest of you, just imagine the combo system established in Devil May Cry pumped up considerably—tossing and juggling enemies like rag dolls. Performing combos will fill a gauge that (surprise!) grants the ability to unleash crazy attacks. We all know what Smilebit can do with cel-shaded 3D, and Red Company has established themselves as a top Japanese developer, with such titles as Bonk's Adventure, Super Tempo, and the blockbuster SakuraTaisen series under their belts.Gungrave will arrive Stateside for the PS2 later this year.

DAVE HALVERSON

researched by nick alonso

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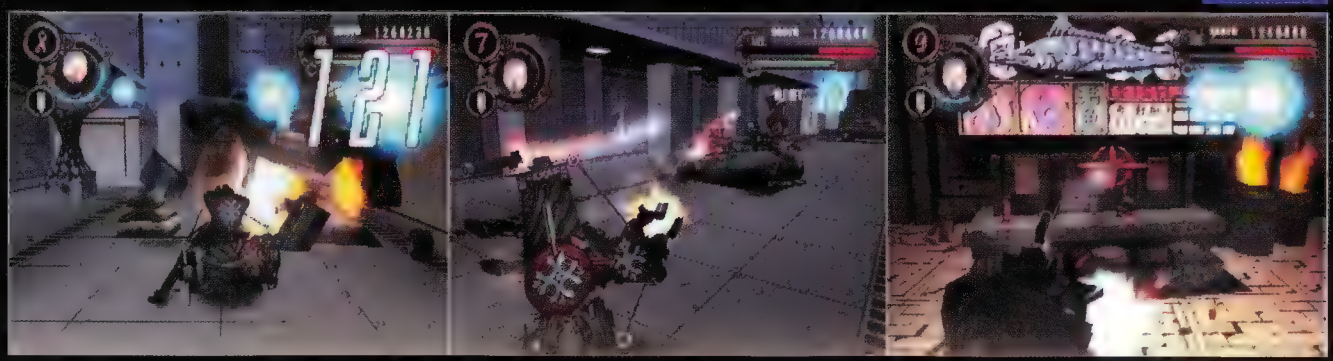

JAPAN'S TOP TEN (as of 04/28/02)

With World Cup fever spreading across Japan, Konami's awesome World Soccer Winning Eleven 6 explodes into the number one slot, selling over 400,000 copies in its first week of sales.

1. World Soccer Winning Eleven 6 Konami ps2
2. Prince of Tennis Konami gba
3. Rockman Zero Capcom gba
4. Zettai Zetsumei Irem ps2
5. Nechu Professional Baseball 2002 Namco ps2
6. Japan/US Professional Baseball FL Square ps2
7. Kingdom Hearts Square ps2
8. World Soccer Winning Eleven 2002 Konami ps
9. Halo Microsoft xbox
10. One Piece Grand Battle 2 Bandai ps

1. World Soccer Winning Eleven 6 Konami ps2

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play anime

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LIGHTS, CAMERA REACTION

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN FOSTER

So you wanna be an anime producer, eh? We sat down with Steven Foster to get the skinny on exactly what that entails, talk about his Angels, and pretty much tap his brain.

How many producers are there at ADV and how long have you been one of them?
I've been with ADV almost three years now. I'm one of three producers here in our Houston studios, and we have two in Austin. But our growth is phenomenal and we're working with another producer now, Jackie Goldenberg from Chicago via London. She's fantastic. It's very cool that we now have a female producer, it adds another color to our already pretty vivid spectrum. ADV's really lucky, and smart, to have so many different producers, because our slate of productions is so varied.

Who chooses who produces what?
I'm not going to pretend to be the auteurs John [Ledford, ADV president] and Matt [Greenfield, cocreator,] are. They both know the shows so much better than I do, so I pretty much rely on their judgement. They decide what properties to acquire and then the shows just find their way to me. And they've never thrown me a bad show. *Generator Gawl* was a heavy-metal thrill ride. *Orphen* was strange, funny, and magical. And *Kurumi*, well, *Kurumi*'s my baby. They keep me fresh because each one's so different. *Colorful*'s up next and that is just whack. Very Man Show, real Comedy Central. A little Tenacious D thrown in. It's nuts, man.

Tell us about casting. Are you limited to a pool of ADV-specific talent, or do you audition?
We're so damn fortunate. Once, there were only two real cities in the U.S. known as "acting" towns. Then Chicago was added to the list. Then Austin slipped in as a result of gaming, and artists like Robert Rodriguez and Sandra Bullock having production companies up and running there. Houston's the fourth city to that roster. Between the commercial work, the occasional film, theatres like the Tony-winning Alley, and now ADV, we're actually a real actor's town. The pool here is unbelievable. Shelley Black, for instance, will come in, lay down her voiceover for one of our shows, and then run downtown to the Alley and hit the stage with Ellen Burstyn in something like "Glass Menagerie." But, yeah, we always audition the roles. You never know who's perfect for a part until you see their voice coming out of the character's mouth.

How many levels of dubs/production are there? For instance: what's the difference between a show like *Steel Angel Kurumi* or *Evangelion* and, say, *Compiler*?
It'd be a lie to say we look at every property equally. I mean, let some studio exec tell you they're as proud of *Titanic* as they are *Freddie Got Fingered*. That's bullshit. We do, however, have such a diverse production slate, we get to treat each title individually and give it the attention it deserves. A lot of people thought *Kurumi* was just fan service, a term I really find offensive both to diehard fans and newbies to the genre, but when I watched the show, I saw something much more. Sure there's nudity, sure it's cutesy at times, playfully sexy. But it's just gorgeous. And the story, contrary to the bubblegummy title song (which I love, by the way), is a lot darker than you would think. So I talked to John and told him we could make this something bigger, I got Claudia involved, etc. I have the ultimate respect for John. He's one of the few CEOs I've worked for who actually listens to his artists and encourages his people to do brave things.

Once casting is complete and you hit the studio, what do you, as producer, oversee?
Everything. Seriously, everything. I wish I could let go of some of the scripting, but I really get off on writing. It's what I do. And directing is so fulfilling because it allows you to collaborate with some amazing talents, actors and engineers. But *Colorful* is actually a series of vignettes, so I'm working with a new writer we've hired and he's got a really warped sense of humor. Plus, Houston is actually a really good training ground for comedians, so I'm gonna work with Rob Mungle, John Swasey, and Tommy Drake if I can get the bastard to quit headlining in Vegas.

Do you also have a hand in marketing, package art, etc?
I have a background in marketing, so, yeah, I kinda get in there. But our art department is so talented, I don't have to do a whole lot of tweaking. If the theme's represented, I'm not gonna screw around with font choices, you know what I mean?

Regarding taking liberties with Japanese scripts, adding in American pop-culture references, for instance, is there a line?
I get more shit about that. I think when I started I changed a lot more than I do now. I've mellowed somewhat. The one sin I will always commit is that bit where the original script beats the dead horse. "I'm Shantar and I come from the future." "You're Shantar?" "Yes." "And you come from the future?" "I come from the future. I am Shantar." "Wow. He's Shantar from the future." Jesus, I got it already! I'm sorry, I can't write the English language version of that. And I'm sure as hell not gonna make my actors say it. One of my actors told me to hit Amazon.com, and I'm such a nerd, I didn't even know there were reviews from buyers on there. Line after line remarked on how vivid, fresh, and funny the script was. There's nothing like that. Nothing. I gotta follow my own voice and it's nice to know a lot of people out there like the sound of it.

With dubbed anime becoming more and more the norm, do you find the artform itself growing? If so, how?
The art's getting better, that's for sure. Matt's doing *Noir*. Have you seen *Noir*? God, it's so smoky and sexy. And I don't mean to be rooting for the home team or anything like that, but I think ADV's titles have some of the best voice acting in the genre. I caught Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* on HBO the other night and

Ladies and gentleman, your Steel Angels, in the flesh. From the left: Kelli Cousins, Hilary Haag, Monica Rial, Kira Vincent Davis, and Claudia Black (pictured above with Steve).

We ca[illegible]ed to exotic beauties like Claudia Blac[illegible]characters, and that seems to be exa[illegible]ing us, as they continue to grow and [illegible]n media.

the direction of the acting was just like some of our work, not like some of that overacted crap you see somewhere else. If it's high comedy, you can go crazy. But if it's a drama, you better play it real. I find a lot of anime directing is just so over the top. I like mine more street. And that's why John brought me into the company. And ADV is growing like crazy. Our titles sell. You can do that math pretty easily I think.

You must have been happy to get the calling for *Steel Angel*, seeing as how the story is so rich in character development and, of course, lots of girls.
It's funny because there's this stigma about voice actors being, well, not models. Honestly, I'd hire a one-eyed ogre if he was the right voice. But I'll tell you, the girls in *Kurumi* are as gorgeous as the actors in *Kurumi*. That's a blast. Yeah, man, how tough is it to work with pretty animated girls and beautiful human actresses? And the characters, while being fantasy-based, are so real. Kurumi is young, she's in love, she's yearning and learning. Karinka just got woken up and gets pissed off when they want her to kill Kurumi. She's more concerned with checking things out. And Saki, like so many gay characters in anime, is treated with both respect and humor.

The English track sounds fantastic, really great work. Do you also adjust/improve sound effects and music at all?
God, I hope you're talking about the acting and the delivery. These women have given me their all and I appreciate it and, this is the important part, it shows. But we do sometimes augment the sound work. Check out what Matt and our engineer Christopher Bourque did on *Spriggan*. These guys were like little audio alchemists on

that one. But we didn't have to mess with Kurumi very much. We ramped up the wings a little. But I can't talk about that; that's later in the show and some aspects of this show are very "closed set," so to speak.

Tell us how you managed to get Claudia Black on the project.
Speaking of "closed set." I met Claudia when I was in LA directing the commentaries for the Farscape series, which we release on DVD. I spent more time with Ben, actually. We talked about marketing and writing, things like that because he's a really good writer and he knew I had a marketing background. Anyway, Claudia and I kinda got on later. And we chatted briefly about what I did and she expressed an interest. We met again in New York and had a blast and we knew we wanted to work together. Then Kurumi came up and I saw this character and I knew it was perfect for her. My executive producer Sharon Papa was so awesome to rearrange production schedule to accommodate Claudia's hiatus between *Queen of The Damned* and *Farscape* so I could get her. The character Claudia plays is fantastic, and she gives a wicked performance. Very fun, especially in the context of the other girls' work. Okay, I can't say anymore or my PR department's gonna kill me.

So, how did you go about choosing your Angels char... I mean Steve. Do you listen to past work and make the connection, or did you know right away who you wanted?
Yeah, the girls kept saying they were Steven's Angels. I knew I wanted Hilary for a certain part. I love Hilary. She's so sweet-looking and beautiful and delicate. Cusses like a sailor. Very charming. I'd worked with Kira before and knew she'd be perfect. I think she was pretty nervous about it, but I told her I would not let her fall. I'm pretty protective of my girls, but I'm a Nazi when it comes to Kira. She's my baby. Monica was perfect for Saki and she hounded me for the role. She never had to, but it was fun watching her sweat. Monnie's awesome. And, Kelli, wow. She hates doing the foley, our wrong term for the punching and kicking and such, but she's the best. One take. She's scary. She's probably one of the best actresses around. I caught her in *The Laramie Project* and she was brilliant. But to me, she'll always be the pink-haired hottie in the maid outfit.

Once you assume the U.S. rights to a certain work, are there any guidlines from the licensor you have to follow?
I don't have to deal with that area, thank God. John has such a good relationship with his business associates, they know he's going to treat the work with respect. I wish I was half as intelligent and savvy as that man is.

What does one need to know to do what you do? What sort of equipment do you work with?
We're on ProTools when we record. All our engineers are musicians, so they pushed hard to get that. It's another attribute of the company. John believes in us, Sharon trusts us, and Matt's so tech-savvy he understands when the engineers want something. There's a good reason. I'm tech stupid. They came back from NAB and you'd think they just came back from Hugh Hefner's house. These guys were jazzed up. I don't have to know the technical stuff. I just tell them what I want and they make it happen. They're magicians. Just give me a keyboard and I'm happy. But if you wanna know, I use Scriptware to write.

So, as *Steel Angel Kurumi* builds, are we in for some surprises?
Oh, yeah. It gets dark. And I don't mean to be all un-PC or anything like that, but I like the violence. There's some sex stuff, too, that's pretty rough. It is not easy to direct, having to tell Monica Rial, "Okay, she is trying to rip your breast off. It hurts. Scream for me, Monica. Make em feel it." I'm a father, so it's kinda difficult sometimes saying that. My son wants to see *Kurumi* bad and I told him not until he was ten years older. I told my daughter she could never see it.

If there is one aspect of this production you are most proud of, what is it?
The actors. Kelli, Kira, Monica, Claude, Shelley Black, of course. They were all so good to me. Long hours, press stuff, which isn't easy answering the same questions over and over again. There are moments in this show where the performances are absolutely perfect. Comedy, drama, Pain, pleasure. Love, hate. No matter what the scene called for, these actors nailed it. I love those women.

And finally, please tell John to nail down *FLCL* next and drop it in your lap! Thanks Steve!

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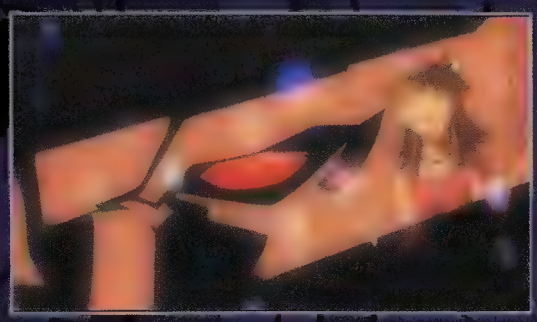
GENERAL HELLSPITAL

Kyosuke Dante's afterlife isn't the vacation he was hoping for. Mom's a genocidal maniac and Dad's a Soul Crusher



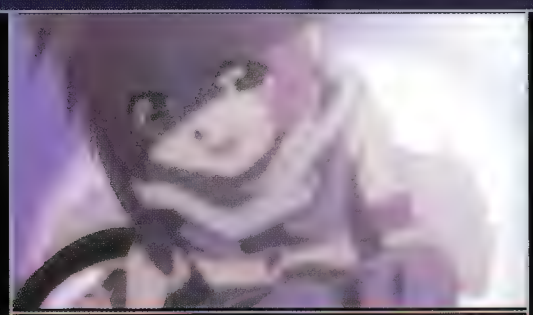
words **dave halverson**

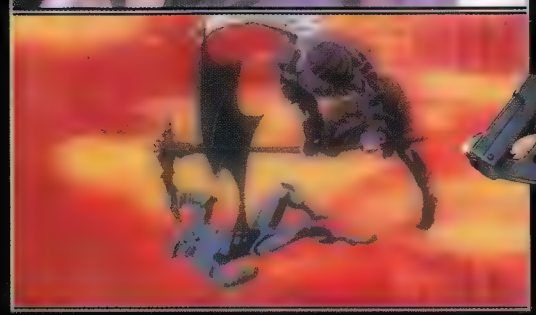
And down the wormhole we go, spiraling out of control, trying to figure out what all of the madness in *SoulTaker* is leading up to. When we last left Kyosuke Date, he'd been murdered by his mother so that he could be resurrected to protect his sister, Runa, from the Hospital—a society of mutants dedicated to her demise. Lying somewhere between the Hospital and Runa are Flickers, manufactured female mutants connected with Runa's life-force that act as decoys, throwing the Hospital off her trail. So by protecting Flickers, Kyosuke is protecting the sister he has never met and, until he died and was resurrected, never knew existed. Who knew death could be such a chore? Within the realm of his rebirth, Kyosuke possesses the ability to transform into the SoulTaker, a super-hero mutant with the ability to crush his enemies. Dispensing the Sonic Cross—a lethal airborne crucifixion—and accompanied by a soaring '80s hair-metal kicker, every Hospital mutant that's stood in Kyosuke's way has been put out of its misery.

In volume two, however, the tide begins to turn. Kyosuke learns from the Hospital director, Richard Vincent, that the mother who murdered him, Mio Dante, wasn't his mother at all. Kyosuke's real mother, Tsubaki Tokisaki, worked at the Hospital doing research on a cure for human mutation through Beta Applicon, a nano-machine genetic converter that alters the genetic code. Conducting human trials behind the director's back, she was trying to create the perfect mutant. The results manifested in the very mutants that thirst for her children's blood, the perfect mutants—Runa and Kyosuke. In other words, the mutants trying to kill Kyosuke and his sister, which he is in turn slaughtering, are the by-products of Tsubaki's creation.

Fleeing with Runa, Tsubaki left Kyosuke with Mio, who 16 years later, for reasons I'm sure we're about to find out, murdered him. And so, here we are, knee deep in God knows what. As for Mr. Vincent, the harbinger of all these revelations well, he's Kyosuke's father, and that's a big problem. Dad's the Soul Crusher, an even more powerful mutant than Kyosuke, and prefers that this reunion be their last.

I could go on, about deep space, gods, human comets, and singing mutant psychotherapists, but then you wouldn't have to watch *Flickering Faith* three times like I did. I'm not sure where *SoulTaker* is going—it's certainly not the ethereal gothic melodrama I was expecting—but I'm definitely coming along for the ride. Traditionally, when religion, science fiction, teenagers, and mutants come together, the results are favorable. **play**





anime reviews

THE SOULTAKER DVD vol.2

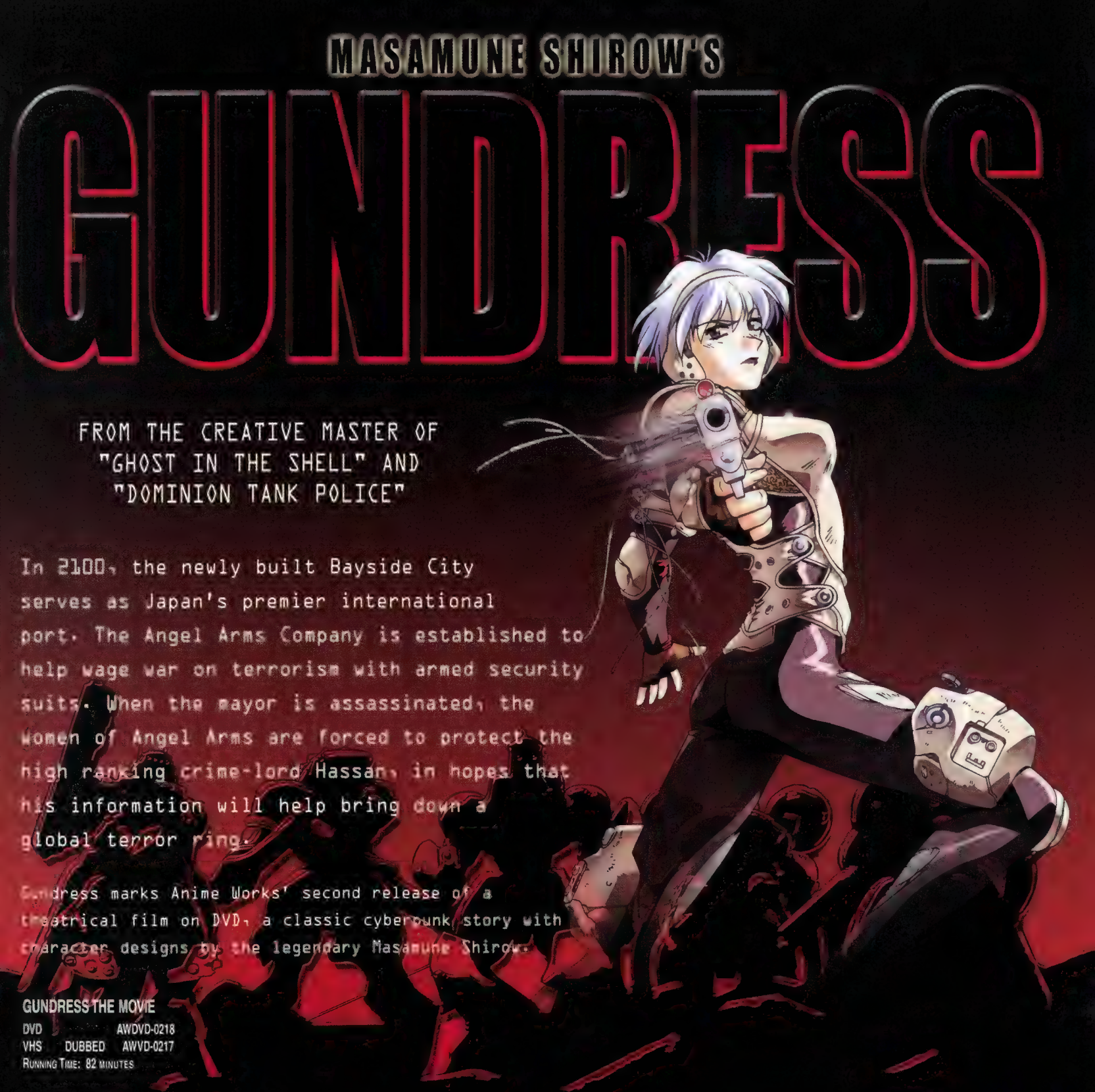
studio: pioneer entertainment
rating: 16 & up
running time: 75 minutes

EXTRA GOODS:
Anamorphic 16:9 widescreen, cutting-edge Motion Menus, Art Gallery, Non-Credit opening and ending, promotional trailers, scene access, bilingual audio: Japanese, English.

play score ●●●○○

MASAMUNE SHIROW'S

GUNDRESS



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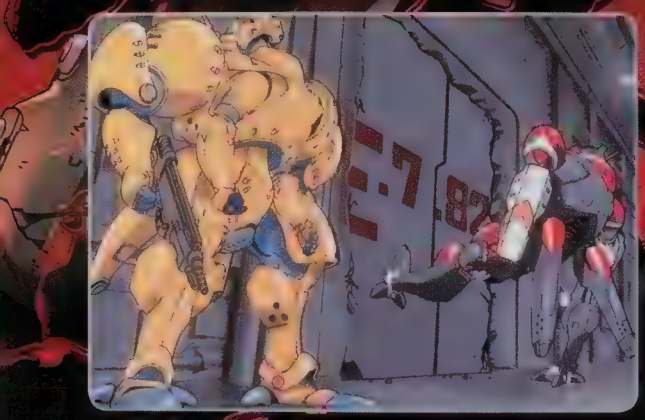
CYBER GIRLS

The girls of 'Gundress' eat Angels for breakfast

words **dave halverson**

Give me anything Shirow, and I'm glued. No matter how old or how animated, his work reveals, without question, one of the most distinct character designers of our time, from his bulbous mecha designs to his unmistakable portrayal of the female form. In *Gundress*, one his older projects finally being brought stateside, both of those hallmarks come bubbling to the surface almost instantly in a futuristic action-thriller about a special organization, Angel Arm, established to fight criminals that the regular police can't handle by dawning armored suits called Gundresses. If that sounds a little like *New Dominion Tank Police*, that's because it is, at least conceptually. But where *Tank Police* revolves around dealing with an array of dirty deeds, *Gundress* has a central premise. Think Charlie's Angels-meets-cyber-crime and you're halfway home. The Angel Arms end up protecting the very scourge they live to eliminate, when they take an arms dealer into their custody in order to reel in the big fish behind a terrorist ring responsible for, among other things, the assassination of the mayor. I'm very curios as to how this DVD will flesh out since there exist controversial scenes from the 1991 original theatrical release, which may or may not make their way onto the final U.S. cut. **play**



anime-previews

GUNDRESS DVD MOVIE

studio: anime works
rating: tba
running time: 120 minutes

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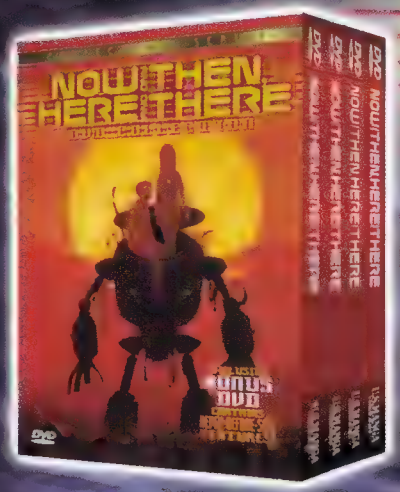

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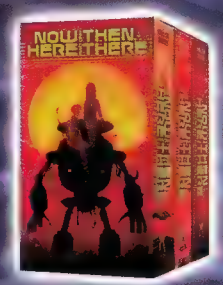

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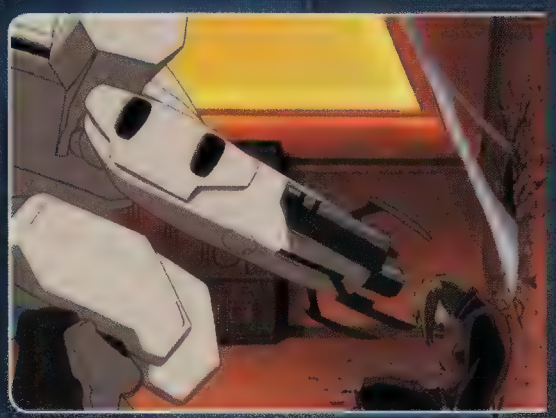
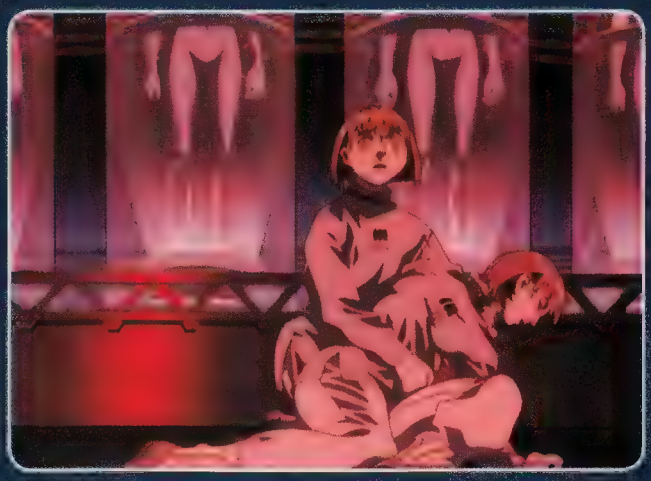
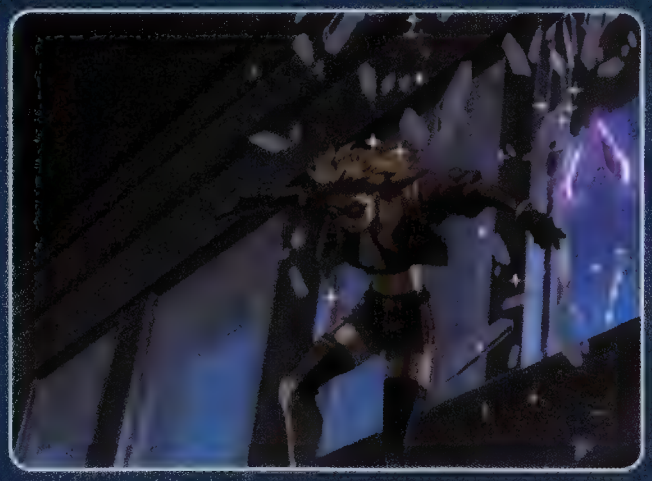
ANDROID MOTHER

Armitage comes out of retirement for robot kind and her human family
Hell hath no fury like an android's scorn

words **dave halverson**







When I heard that Juliette Lewis was on board to play Naomi Armitage in the sequel to one of my favorite anime movies, I was a bit put off. When Elizabeth Berkley spoke life into the troubled android and dealt with an ensuing identity crisis in the first feature, *Poly Matrix*, I didn't identify her with any role in particular. But to me, Juliette Lewis is, and will always be, Mallory, the role that defined her as an actress. But seeing and hearing how well she got into character, it never became an issue watching *Dual Matrix*, like the way Claire Danes as Princess Mononoke did. Her name on the marquee will definitely earn *Poly Matrix* extra retail cred, so it's a win-win.

When we last saw Armitage—an illegal "Third Type" android, a model deemed too human and marked for termination—she was miserable, investigating the murders of her kind, while searching for any humanity she might have within her. Ross Sylibus, the Mars cop assigned to protect her, grew to love her, and it is in the throws of family and motherhood we find her as *Poly Matrix* opens. It's weird seeing an android (especially one we've come to know as a weapon) in a kitchen baking a cake, but also eerily symbolic because we all know that someday it will come to pass (which is why I'm being frozen provided they figure out the thawing process). Things don't remain peaceful for long, though, as back on Earth the debate over robots' rights is heating up. When a corporate faction raids a facility on Earth where Mars is conducting a secret project to create more Third Types to meet new demands, Armitage telekinetically witnesses the massacre. Both the humans and androids who work there are massacred, so without a word to her daughter Yoko or husband Ross, she slips into the night and heads for Earth—Chicago, to be exact. The man behind the slaughter, executive VP of Earth Robo Tronics, Dimitrio Mardini, has spun the incident to look like a robot uprising. The demand for more android importation from Mars is bad for business, and if the bill passes for robot rights, fueling that demand, he's in trouble. Dimitrio would rather use Armitage, the only android capable of human reproduction, to meet the demands on Earth by creating disposable armies, cheap labor, and love droids. He sees product, nothing more, and that has never sat real well with Naomi. Soon enough, however, her husband and daughter get caught in the controversy and cross fire, and the result, *Dual Matrix*, is a sci-fi triumph.

The overall production, which fuses generous amounts of cel-shaded 3D with traditional animation, is slick and gorgeous, imbued with shadows and muted colors contrasted with the odd burst of gaudily saturated interiors. The music is perfectly suited with orchestral whispers accompanying the drama and thick guitar riffs and bass tracks behind the action. There's one scene, in particular, where Armitage is evading termination, as only she can, where the animation seems almost liquid, and the car and helicopter chases, both rendered in 3D, are as distinctively stylish. Loaded with valuable extras, like real insight about creating an animated feature, *Armitage Dual Matrix* is yet another anime DVD to be celebrated by both fans and non-fans alike, and further substantiation that Japanese animation should be considered by the academy in the years ahead. **play**

anime-reviews

ARMITAGE: DUAL MATRIX MOVIE DVD

studio: pioneer
rating: 16 & up
running time: 90 minutes

EXTRA GOODS:
Assembling Armitage featurette, 5.1 Music Player, English and Japanese Dolby 5.1, Character Design Gallery, Teaser Trailer, Pioneer Previews (Hellsing!) English Dolby Surround, Scene Access, and a free 16-page color character guide

play score ●●●●○

'Dual Matrix' is the kind of animated epic that anyone can sink into, anime fan or not

TEACHER PETS

Ex-biker, delinquent...teacher? Oh yeah!

words **dave halverson**

If only school were this interesting, we'd all have degrees; they might be in sex education or how to become a student of life, but hey, it's all about the journey, isn't it? TokyoPop's *GTO* (*Great Teacher Onizuka*) starts out like your typical sexploitation anime, begging for comparison to comic farces like *Ping Pong Club*, *Haunted High School* or *Golden Boy*. But it quickly sheds its panties to become more of a sitcom about a man who cares so deeply about his misfit homeroom class, who hate his guts, that he'll do anything to get them on the right track, no matter how screwed up they are. It's like *Welcome Back Kotter* without the bad hair and wardrobe...well, not quite. Onizuka is actually an ex-juvenile delinquent, the former leader of the most notorious biker gang in Japan. A second-degree black belt and full-on bad-ass, he took the job as student teacher to score with 16-year-old girls, not actually teach. He's got tenacity to burn, but this is a guy who paid people to take his tests in high school. After a rocky start in public school as a student teacher (where he ends up almost getting framed for molesting a steamy hot 16-year-old), Onizuka decides that he's going to become the greatest teacher in the world (!), but sadly he can't pass the exam. So after a run-in with a butt-sniffing vice principal, he ends up at the posh Holy Forest Academy. Yep, he's teaching private school. He's also living in a janitors closet, bathing in the sink, and playing PlayStation all day—Wild Arms, Ape Escape...at least he's got good taste.

Providing comic relief, beyond content that is undeniably wacky enough to begin with, the pervading story arch chronicling the balding loser vice principal Uchi Yumada, who hates Onizuka with a screaming, undying passion, is worth the price of admission. His family life is such a bust and confidence so shot that he puts all of his hopes and dreams for restored dignity in his shiny new Cresta, the car of his dreams. So, of course, at every turn, the car gets completely mangled, pushing poor Uchi closer and closer to the edge. *GTO* is the kind of long-running series that you don't watch for the animation—although it holds up—but for the sheer guilty pleasure of it all. It's at times overly preachy and at other times overly crude, but most of the time it's just plain entertaining. **play**

anime-reviews

GTO
DVD vol.1 & 2

studio: tokyopop
rating: 16 & up
running time: 125 minutes

EXTRA GOODS:
Dual language, Motion Menus, original Japanese opening, Tokyo Pop previews, eye catches, original character sketches

play score

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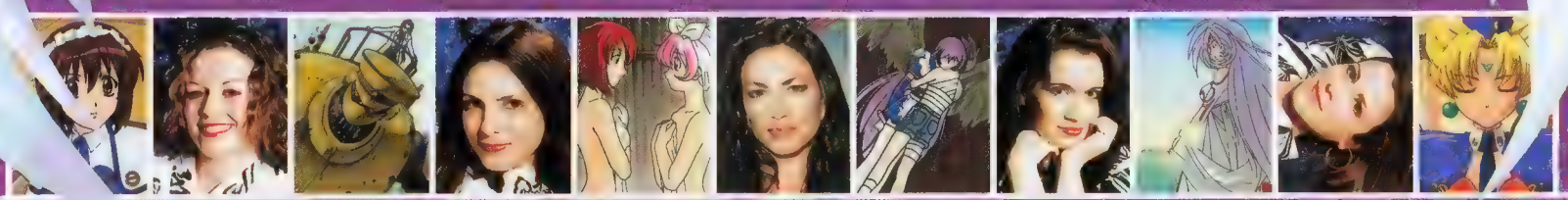


Princess Nine's Kelli Cousins | *Nadesico's* Kira Vincent-Davis | *Farscape's* Claudia Black | *Gasaraki's* Monica Rial | *BGC Tokyo 2040's* Hillary Haag

THE STEEL ANGEL KURUMI © Kaishaku / Kadokawa Shoten • PONY CANYON

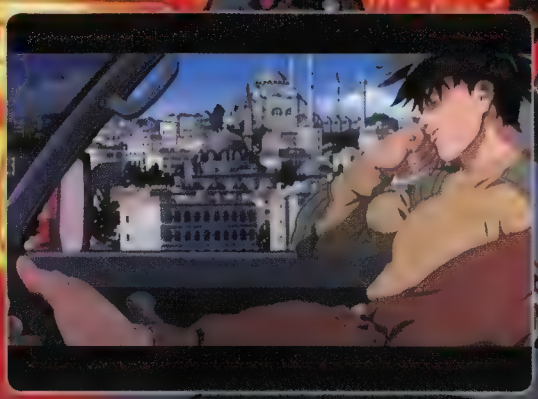
POWER ARK

The Ark has been found–and it could kill us all

words **dave halverson**

Writing about *Spriggan* has become an annual event for me, following it on its journey from Japan to America, penning something at every turn. I'm sure by now that every last anime fan on the planet has a good grasp of the premise. *Spriggan* is a more feasible telling of Noah's Ark than what we are presented with in the Bible, where a single man manages to build, then fill, a boat with two of every creature on the planet and set sail. Provided you could get two elephants onto a ship, the mess they would make and food they would consume while you rounded up, say, two groundhogs would be overwhelming. Let alone what two of every species of animal would do to each other, and a wooden boat, over the course of 40 days and 40 nights. I believe in God, but let's face it: the dudes who wrote the Old Testament must have been munching on some mighty toxic vegetation. The Ark presented in *Spriggan*, an omnipotent device that harnesses the secrets of creation within its black core, is much more palatable.

The society that protects the Ark, and other artifacts like it, uses Spriggan's elite, almost invincible soldiers, to guard them from attack or, worse, the risk of the knowledge they contain falling into the wrong hands. This is the story of what happens when that comes to pass, and it is filled with some of the most stunning animation that exists—period. *Spriggan* takes you on a ride, where you never quite know which way it is going to turn until the shocking, unexpected end. There are many forms of anime, TV series, OVA's, movies, etc., and then there are the true epics like *Akira, Wings of Honneamise, Princess Mononoke,* and *Ghost in the Shell*. *Spriggan* is about to take its place among them. **play**



anime reviews

SPRIGGAN
DVD MOVIE

studio: adv films
rating: 17 & up
running time: 90 minutes

EXTRA GOODS:
Original 1:1.85 aspect ratio—enhanced for widescreen TV, ADR Director's commentary, English and Japanese languages, 5.1 Dolby Surround, English Subtitles, Animated Interactive Menus, Video Portfolios: Character Designs, Vehicles & Equipment, Key Backgrounds, ADV previews

play score

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Landlock DVD vol.1

manga entertainment
15 & up • 98 minutes

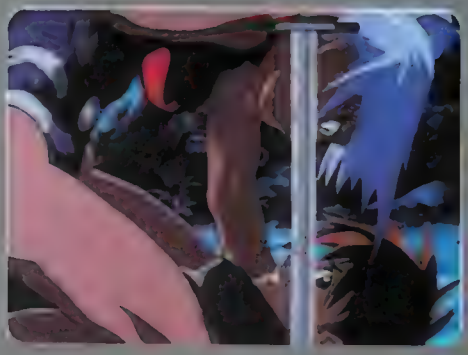
English and Japanese language, English Subtitles, Character Bios, Photo Gallery, Manga DVD catalog, video previews, and Weblinks

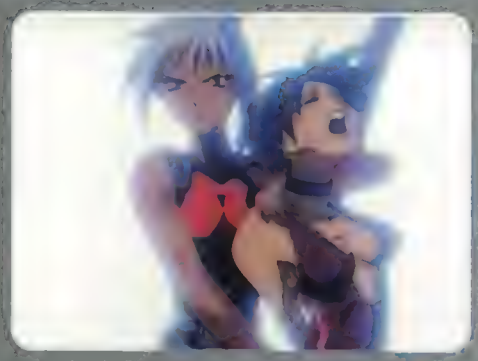
play score

words by **dave halverson**

Featuring character designs by Masami Yuki (Battle Athletes—available for the first time on DVD—make sure it's seen, and stay in the top 5 percent the most culturally confused family in the annals of anime. Born after the Wag Goddess passes through the body of the chosen maiden and dooms the boy with one last curse, Lute, son of Mutig, the successor to his father's powerful gift—the ability to harness the immense power of the earth—is ruthless behind anyone who has come between his father and the amazing rock. Mutig is killed in cold blood by the warrior Agakuak, who, seemingly enough, has lost face, Agakuak was raised as the captain of a powerful army by his father, Zanuse, the fearsome lord of Lagamenta. Zanuse's fearful wrath has—with the exact purpose of slaying Mutig and his offspring in one stroke—been set upon Gunsight Mountain, as Agakuak is trying to take it over, and is commanded by Amos, Lute's oldest, who not only was one of the first to fall victim to the curse, but was also the first to suffer from the Lack.

So, you see where this is going. Wandering Lutetown you will. It's easy to forget you're watching cartoons, as the story and characters really emanate the sense of the place, which you're totally dazed. The sense of scope towards end of movie. Lush. Greatly animation. Strong character designs and a good story—what's not to love? **play**





Golden Boy DVD vol.1

adv films
17 & up • 75 minutes

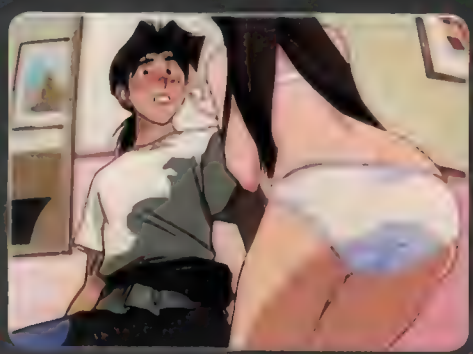
Clean opening and closing, image gallery, U.S. trailers, ADV previews

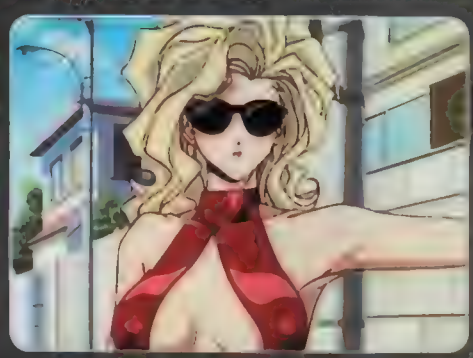
play score

words by **dave halverson**

It hardly seems appropriate to call Golden Boy a classic, seeing as how it still looks better than most series anime and has still never been challenged in the late teen-to-adult adventure-comedy category. Paving the way for perverts to come, setting the bar impossibly high in the process, Kintaro Oe is the king of contrast: he's as horny as a New York traffic jam but brave as a bull—dumb as a rock, but a closet genius. Although he's finished all of the necessary classes to get his law degree, Kintaro roams the land instead on his trusty Mikazuki V Mountain Bike, taking odd jobs and chronicling his exploits in his journal—a student of life with a perpetual boner. In the process, Kintaro–who has a real nose for the ladies–is almost constantly surrounded by beautiful women (when he's not getting his ass kicked), but just when you think sexploitation–watching the over-the-top antics spin out of control–Golden Boy reveals its morality. Ultimately, Kintaro worships females (and, believe me, the women in Golden Boy deserve the praise), and genuinely cares about their feelings deeply, even if he does come as a complete perv.

As ADV reaches into their bag of tricks, pulling out the gems they've acquired over the last decade, it dawns on you just how much the company has contributed to the world of anime. Golden Boy is sheer delight and they haven't even touched Dragon Half and countless others that will likely make anime on DVD that much sweeter. **play**





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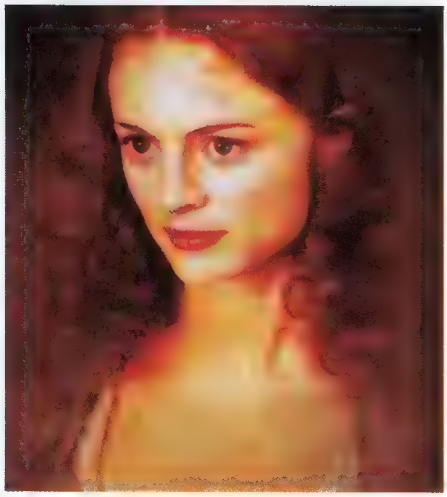
106 interview: phantom planet
107 music reviews

FROM HELL

PLAY: "It's my belief that if you cut into a thing deeply enough, if your incisions are precise and persistent and conducted methodically, then you may reveal not only that thing's inner workings, but also the meaning behind those workings." So begins Alan Moore's odyssey in the introduction to *From Hell*—in the comic book rendition, not this Hugh Brothers filmic depiction of the same name. Luckily, equal sensibilities were in tow. But unlike their typical visceral and nihilistic signature filmmaking, the Brothers opted for a more traditional approach with *From Hell*. Undoubtedly, they could've crafted an over-the-top, hack-and-slash horror movie about the Ripper; instead, they've created a period movie that actually tells a suspenseful tale, one that leaves you guessing till the very end. The movie centers on Inspector Abberline's (played by Johnny Depp) investigation into the grisly murders of five prostitutes in London's East Side. In the graphic novel, Moore points the finger at Sir William Withey Gull, Queen Victoria's royal physician—he had the surgical skill to commit such gruesome murders, even though he was in his 70s at the time. The movie, though, much like the comic book, concentrates more on what happened back then in 1888 then on who actually committed the murders. How's this for style: When Jack the Ripper kills his first victim, all you see is a shiny blade plunging into darkness. And with each powerful stroke, the blade gets covered in blood. Gratuitous? Hardly. Suspenseful. Hell yes. But it's not a great movie; it's an entertaining one.

VALUE: For starters, the first disc (of this double-disc collection) has an excellent commentary with the Hughes Brothers; over 20 deleted scenes and an alternate ending. The second disc has the very cool



"Jack the Ripper: 6 Degrees of Separation," an interactive investigation (close to an hour of commentary, if you've ever wanted to know more about Jack the Ripper, you've come to the right place). There is also a "making-of" featurette with the Hughes Brothers, as well as an HBO special hosted by Heather Graham (looking extremely fine, as always).

TOM HAM

movie ●●●●○
dvd ●●●●●

BATMAN BEYOND

WARNER BROS.
RATED PG-13

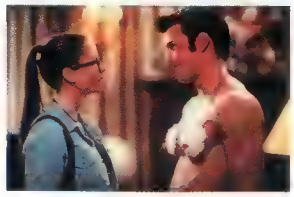
PLAY: That's right: *Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker* has had a sketchy past since it was released two years ago. This "original, uncut version" isn't much longer than its censored cousin—77 minutes vs. 76—but it does add some much needed development to the story… and a PG-13 rating. Yet *Batman Beyond* has always been a cannon fodder for fans—the futuristic tale of Terry McGinnis wasn't embraced by the hardcore set when it original premiered. Being such a diversion from the traditional story of Bruce Wayne and his crime-fighting woos, comic book aficionados sighed. But the series has since concluded its TV run, and this movie holds up quite well. And to make it an event, this movie brings the Dark Knight's most sinister nemesis back from the dead, and he manages to give Gotham City a major wedgy.

VALUE: Writers/producers Paul Dini, Bruce Timm and Glen Murakami hold no punches on an audio commentary that describes the history of this direct-to-video film from day one—and some very juicy anecdotes leak out. It's for the animation junkie, really, but it's great to see Warner Bros. pay attention to their more mature audience.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●○○
dvd ●●●○○

NOT ANOTHER TEEN...



COLUMBIA/TRI-STAR
RATED R

PLAY: It was only a matter of time before one fearless movie attacked everything that's associated with youth in the film industry—the gross-out humor, the high school dances, the social cliches. And not only does *Not Another Teen Movie* take on Freddie Prinze, Jr. fare, it manages to slide in over 20 years of parody. Dating all the way back to John Hughes' most memorable moments, there's a bit of everything in this R-rated celebration of raunchiness. Too bad that a lot of the humor was given away in the movie's trailer—or, worse yet, that there's not even really that much to laugh at. There are sequences that'll have you on the floor, clenching your stomach, but other times, you'll be waiting for even a trickle of a good joke to tease your funny bone. And if you're not educated in the "artistry" that is the teen movie, then avoid this depressing comedy like the plague—you won't get a single joke. But if that's the case, *Not Another Teen Movie* is essentially yet another picking from the teen movie roster. It's just a bit funnier.

VALUE: This "special edition" is definitely worth a peek. 18 deleted scenes manage to jam in a few more gut-wrenchers, but nothing as effective as the ditties already in the film.

ET COHEN

movie ●●●○○
dvd ●●●●○

NEWSBYTES

edited by et cohen

. . . The endos are back: We offer a **first glimpse of *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*** (at right) taken on location in Tujunga, CA. The project, however, has been under tight wraps—even the security guards bordering the set claim it is a film called *York Square* . . . In other comic news: filming of the big-screen version of *Daredevil* is already underway—secretly—but the casting choices are public knowledge. **Ben Affleck plays the Marvel superhero, Jennifer Garner (*Alias*) dons spandex for her role as Electra, and Michael Clarke Duncan puts on an XXXL suit for his take on bad guy Kingpin** . . . . . Superstar Brit: The popularity of *The Osbournes* continues to soar week after week. **7.75 million fans dialed into MTV on April 21, continuing to set records for the cable network.** So due to the unparalleled popularity of the show, the modern day Addams Family and MTV are currently locked in negotiations for a second season.

First look at *T3: Rise of the Machines*

13 GHOSTS

WARNER BROS.
RATED R

PLAY: Stop trying to think of excuses not to dig into this 90-minute horrorshow. *Thirteen Ghosts*, regardless of your preconceptions, has one trick—and it does it extremely well. It's a nightmare of a movie that oozes style, creating an atmosphere that spooks and sparks. The plot is so ridiculously far-fetched, you'll quickly lose yourself in the absurdity. And that's exactly what you're supposed to do: escape. Forget about realism; dismiss that analytical voice in your head—in fact, smother it. And just try and forget about last year's *House on Haunted Hill* (which was the first in an annual lineup of Dark Castle productions, each based on classic black-and-white creepers). Here's the plot rundown: a maniacal adventurer, who spent the later years of his life "collecting" ghosts, dies during the capture of his 12th spirit. His relatives then inherit all of his cash, along with a nifty puzzle-cube glass house in the middle of nowhere (which is really the ghastly prison for the dead). The tension begins when the doors lock behind them; and it doesn't let up until the end.

VALUE: There are some decent additives here—a director's commentary being the best—but for a popcorn movie like this, they don't serve much purpose.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●○○
dvd ●●●○○

NOVOCAINE

ARTISAN
RATED R

PLAY: Just like *The Cable Guy*, *Novocaine* is a film that could have collapsed within a minute of pressing "play." Like Jim Carrey, Steve Martin isn't known for his cynical, darkly dramatic performances. He's a wild and crazy guy; he's the one and only jerk. But it's obvious that after Martin's voice dips into bleak monotone narration during the film's opening sequence that the role of this dentist on the edge was written for him. At its core, *Novocaine* is a throwback to gritty film noir from the James Cagney days, but on the surface level, it's sadistically colored comedy—that is, if you laugh at things like murder, drug abuse and illicit sex given the opportunity (which, in this case, insights some guilty chuckles). The plot really bites in when Helena Bonham Carter is introduced as a doll-face sedative addict with a hot-nosed, narcotics-dealing brother (Scott Caan). As long as you're not expecting Martin in one of his trademark personas, then *Novocaine* will definitely make a positive impression.

VALUE: "Bitten," a cool little featurette, explores real-life forensic dentistry; and a commentary by David Atkins proves why he was the only writer/director for the job (he hails from dental family).

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●●○
dvd ●●●○○

MULOHOLLAND DR.

UNIVERSAL
RATED R

PLAY: David Lynch is a filmmaker who defies all logic, and *Mulholland Drive* is a perfect example—another compelling mindtrip from a filmmaker known numerous times over for his excessive oddness. The film doesn't appear to make any sense, yet it's thoroughly entertaining—practically hypnotizing—gripping you for every second of its two-and-a-half hour run. The basic plot isn't lethal at all—it's just a few cut-away stories about an aspiring actress, a down-on-his-luck director, and some other seemingly normal folks—but it's when they begin to intertwine and shift gears that you feel like gravity has been lifted from under your feet. Because when the mileage-heavy plot of *Mulholland Drive* really kicks in, it's comparable to floating mid-air in a bottomless void (you don't know where you are or why, but it's bizarrely soothing). Ultimately, though, don't tread here unless you've let Lynch into your head before (*Twin Peaks*, *Lost Highway*, *Eraserhead*). And be prepared for multiple viewings—just one will never do.

VALUE: Nothing, except for Lynch's "10 Clues to Unlocking this Thriller"—which is quite helpful when untying the cinematic knots.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●●○
dvd ●○○○○

EARTH vs. THE SPIDER

COLUMBIA/TRI-STAR
RATED R

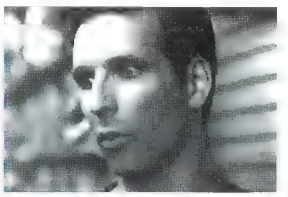
PLAY: Think of *Earth vs. the Spider* as the anti-*Spider-Man*. It's part of the "Creatures Features" line of direct-to-video flicks from Hollywood monster-maker Stan Winston, and it sticks in your memory for a few reasons—but not all good. A messy screenplay and some silly performances basically translate to "eject." But if you brave this endless 90-minute marathon of fluff, you'll find out what would happen to Marvel's noble Spidey if he were to gradually transform into an arachnid—an eight-legged, hairy human-sized kind—instead of just having web-slinging abilities. Basically, the gift of super-strength, as this cheese-fest shows, would ultimately cause the good guy to turn into quite an ugly villain. It's too bad for nerdy Quentin, *Spider*'s tragic lead, because his comic book curiosity was ultimately his demise. Becoming a superhero isn't all it's cracked up to be. Just ask former *Ghostbuster* Dan Aykroyd; in this lackluster flick, he plays the lowly detective who chases the big bug. His career has basically flip-flopped from blockbuster funnyman to… um… what's the best word for "burnout actor that should look into managing a florist shop?"

VALUE: It's amazing that the movie's even in widescreen.

ET COHEN

movie ●●○○○
dvd ●○○○○

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW



DOCURAMA
NOT RATED

PLAY: Todd McFarlane has an interesting life story. He was simply a kid with a love for the ballpark and an urge to draw. And gradually, from low-rent gigs for Marvel to his own *Spider-Man* book, his dream was slowly becoming a reality. But it wasn't until he broke away to start his own company when things truly came to fruition. After he launched the independently published, creator-owned *Spawn*, the writer/artist/entrepreneur finally had enough money to fuel his baseball obsession, resulting in quite a hefty purchase that made waves worldwide: "McFarlane buys McGwire's 70th Home Run Ball for $3 million." So *The Devil You Know* is basically a dual-balanced documentary about comic books and America's favorite pastime—and it's actually pretty entertaining. Filmmaker Kenton Vaughan invaded the life of the multi-millionaire for several months to capture the action, chatting with family, friends and co-workers. It's great, mostly because McFarlane has so much energy—and, even better: he's brutally honest, always managing to incite a little riot with each response.

VALUE: An art gallery is hardly an extra, but this is only a documentary.

ET COHEN

movie ●●●○○
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But there will be bonus episodes even sooner: the producers are working frantically to cull together some discarded footage to lengthen the season a bit . . . Jedi midnight: In a recent interview, George Lucas told *Time* about his post *Episode II* plans: **"The next film is really dark," Lucas says. "The issue is, will people stand for it?** But I've got to tell the story. And when I finish it, I'll be 60. I've got a lot of things I want to do with my life other than more of this. I'm in a position now where I can say, I'm gonna make this movie because I wanna see this movie." . . . A smell-good *Gladiator*: **Ridley Scott, most recently coming off of *Black Hawk Down*, is reportedly attached to a film based on the *novel Perfume: Story of a Murderer*.** Stanley Kubrick was originally tapped for the project, but after his death, the tale of a French child born with a perfect sense of smell who murders a 13-year-old girl was shopped around . . . Computer-animated love: **Disney has officially announced the last three films in their partnership with Pixar Animation Studios.** First up, *Finding Nemo* is an underwater adventure targeted for release next summer. For Christmas 2004, Brad Bird (director of *The Iron Giant*) will helm *The Incredibles*, an action-adventure comedy that centers on a family of suburban superheroes. Finally, the holiday season in 2005 will bring about director/Pixar co-founder John Lasseter's *Cars*, a Route 66-based story about a bunch of talking… um… cars . . .

BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES
WARNER BROS.
AVAILABLE NOW

CAPED CARTOONS

Bruce Timm, the mind behind 'Batman: The Animated Series'—among other insanely popular superhero shows—reflects on his history with spandex-wearing crime fighters.

as told to jon m gibson

Bruce Timm

Bruce Timm may not be a household staple, but his resume is—and this month celebrates his many credits. *Batman: The Animated Series* began his legacy, setting the stage for animation that defied convention—dark, moody action cartoons were nearly inaccessible before; and the animated triumphs of *Superman* and the future-spun *Batman Beyond* built upon his fanbase. Then last fall, Cartoon Network premiered the most extravagant superhero 'toon to date, *Justice League*. Since, they've all found homes on DVD in an unofficial collection from Warner Bros. (all sold separately, though). But the work can't always speak for itself, so we called the crowned king of comic book TV for some answers. Welcome to the House of Timm.

How do you think you've changed over the years—from *Batman* to *Justice League*—from style to scripting to everything else?
You know, there's 10 years of work between *Batman* and *Justice League*. It's funny, because I don't go back and re-watch my old stuff very often because I'm just too busy workin' on the new stuff. But now that these DVDs are comin' out, I actually sat down and watched the first five *Batman* episodes the other night and it was kind of an eye-opener. I was like, "Wow, I haven't seen those in a long time." They're pretty good to this day; I can see why it had such an impact. But *Batman* was all about mood—about dark, spooky film noir, moody mood. And *Justice League* is not really about that at all—it's more about grand-scale heroics. Even though *Batman* is part of the show, it's not a psychological three- or four-character drama the way *Batman* was.

Yeah, it's very playful and light-hearted, in a sense. But is that a product of the network you're producing the show for?
Well, every network we've worked at has had different perimeters of what we could and couldn't do, and different directions that they wanted us to go in. Oh, sure, even in the time that we were working for Kids' WB—just from the personnel changeovers—things changed there from one year to the next. And that always has an influence on it. The absolute great thing about Cartoon Network is they really stay out of it. They give us very little creative notes; really about the only kind of notes we get from them are Broadcast Standards and Practices notes. We're actually really spoiled—it's the most freedom we've ever had to do a show the way we wanted to do it.

So were there a lot of clashes back in the day?
Yeah, back in the day, for sure. Because when we first started doing it, it was the first show I ever produced and I didn't have a track record. They had seen the artwork and they had liked it, but they didn't know whether I knew what I was talking about in terms of the direction of the series. I wouldn't say "clashes," but there was a whole lot of discussion of what the show should be and what it could be. That all really changed when we got the first episode back animated and they were actually able to see that I kinda knew what I was talking about and these weird ideas that I had about doing an adventure cartoon would actually work. From that point on, things got a lot smoother.

Maybe I'm being presumptuous, but before *Batman: TAS* there wasn't anything quite like it in animation. What did you think was missing from comic book-based shows?
Everything [laughs].

Well, I'll phrase it this way: Why did *Superfriends* suck?
A lot of things. Having worked on the *He-Man* show and a number of other action-adventure shows at Marvel and Filmation, there were a lot of reasons why those shows came out the way they did. There was literally a lack of money; those shows were done very, very cheaply. Having worked on production—actually on the floor at the shows—I was aware that a lot of design work that went into those shows was actually counter-productive. Even though those shows were done for very little money, and theoretically done for limited animation, then all of the character designs were all really too complicated and too complex. I knew that if we simplified the designs and tried to turn the simplicity of it into a strength instead of a weakness, then it would help the animation quality overall. Also, at Warner Bros., we were spending quite a bit more money to make the shows a higher production value. And another thing, too, we were really, really fortunate to come out right after the first Tim Burton *Batman* movie had come out, so that really cemented the idea of a dark, pretty serious superhero concept in the public's mind. We never would have been able to do that show if it hadn't been for the first Tim Burton *Batman* movie—there's just no way. Up until that point, superheroes were just considered kid's stuff. You weren't able to have fight scenes or drama or any of that stuff—much less, guns going off.

Basically, superhero shows were lame.
Exactly. One of my other co-producers, Alan Burnett, loves to tell the story that back in the day when he was working on *Superfriends*, the characters weren't allowed to make a fist, much less, you know, punch anybody. Literally, they would get Broadcast Standards and Practices notes that said, "This character looks too aggressive. He can't clench his fist."

In *Justice League*, you take an even more unique approach. Every story arc is presented in two or three parts, and I'm sure there are larger ones to come. Did you

"*BATMAN* WAS ALL ABOUT MOOD—ABOUT DARK, SPOOKY FILM NOIR, MOODY MOOD."

have any reservations about splitting up the plot over a period of several weeks?
Just because of the nature of the beast. You have all these characters that they all have to be serviced. If you're gonna put 'em in the show, they have to do something. So we narrowed it down so that not all seven characters are in an episode very often together. Even then, even if you have four or five or them, they all have to have somethin' to do and have somethin' to say. Just the fact that there are these more powerful characters, you have to give them more powerful villains to fight. The consequences have to bigger, the threats have to bigger and the stories have to be bigger. We felt that working in an hour-long format would beneficial to us.

Who's going to be making an appearance in the second season?
Nah, I can't spill the beans. Nooooooooo.

The Wonder Twins, maybe?
[laughs] No comment—no comment on the Wonder Twins issue.

Are there any feisty fan run-ins locked away in your diary?
I've actually been very fortunate that most of the fans that I meet at conventions and store signings, at the very worst, they're just overly enthusiastic. I don't really have any horror stories to relate, unfortunately. They've all been very generous and very positive. Sure, we got some people that complained about the choices we made. You know, we got a lot of heat from fans when we did *Batman Beyond*. That was such a radical take on the Batman mythos. But even that turned out to be okay. Most people seemed to dig what we were doin' with it. But I haven't had any scary moments with fans. The fans are great.

Did you ever feel like you haven't concluded a series?
Sure, sure. But it's all decided on a much higher level than here at the office. It's never been our decision. When *Batman* came up, we were right in the middle of what we called the "new look" episodes that we did on the WB where we redesigned the whole show. We were really diggin' what we were doin' on that show, so to have the rug pulled out from under us and then have to go on to *Batman Beyond* was kind of a shock. You know, whatever. It all works out for the best, I think, in the long run. It's nice to have a change. In a way, with *Batman* it might have been better for us to stop when we did while we were ridin' high rather than when the train started running out of gas. I certainly could go back and do more *Batman* episodes or *Batman Beyond* episodes if the opportunity came up. I love all those characters, I love the whole world that we created for them. There's always that possibility.

So tell me about *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*. It didn't do too well in the theaters.
No, it died—it died at the box office. On one had, for whatever reason, I don't think it was promoted terribly well. It only played in matinees—it was never played in the evenings in most places. People considered it a kid's movie. But if you look at it, you say, "Wow, this is not really a kid's movie."

It's just a *tad* dark [laughs].
It's just a little bit dark, kind of slowly paced, and kinda adult. Sure, kids were interested in seeing it, but I think there would have been a whole other audience that was interested in seeing it. And you know, also, I'm still kind of two-minded about *Phantasm*. I think it's a good movie, for the most part, but it is kind of a downer—it has kind of a slow moving, serious movie. It's not exactly a thrill ride—it's not a roller coaster. On that aspect, you know, it might just be a fault of the movie itself.

Is there still one superhero you want to merge with animation; or maybe just a dream project?
Uhh, yeah. [laughs] It's gonna be on my grave: "Comic book fan." There's all kinds of characters I'd actually like to do in animation. Because I have been doing superheroes for 10 years now, a big part of me wants to take a break from superheroes and try to do something completely different—probably still action-adventure oriented. You know, once *Justice League* is done, I think I may take a little break from long underwear guys and do something a little different if I can.

You worked with Don Bluth on *The Secret of N.I.M.H.*, and Ralph Bakshi on *The New Adventures of Mighty Mouse*. What did you take away from the grand masters?

A legend in the making: The storyboards for the striking opening sequence to *Batman: The Animated Series*

"IT'S GONNA BE ON MY GRAVE: 'COMIC BOOK FAN.'"

Batman Beyond **lead the Gotham City hero into the future; it was a major departure from** ***The Animated Series.***

I learned a lot workin' for Don—a lot of the simplicity of the *Batman* style, I attribute directly to my training with Don. A lot of the basic animation theories, design theories—straights against curves, overlapping action. And, uh, I can't say I learned much from Ralph. He was there, and we had a lot of contact with him, but that was pretty much John Kricfalusi's show. He kind of let John do what he was going to do. I did learn an awful lot from John, I think. Up until that point in my career, that was the most fun I ever had working in animation. Most other places I worked, I couldn't wait for six o'clock to come so I could leave and go home. On *Mighty Mouse*, we'd routinely stay there until midnight or later every night just workin' on it because we loved workin' on it so much. Strangely enough, if you try to compare his style to mine, you don't see any real similarities there. I just picked up a lot of things, mostly about exaggeration and design, odd juxtaposes of things that you normally wouldn't think would work, and just a little bit more of opening my mind to the possibilities of animation. There was a real intensity working for John.

Then there were your stints on *G.I. Joe*, *He-Man* and *Tiny Toons*, which are far cries from where your WB career took you. What about those gigs?
I learned a lot about what not to do—again, no offense to anybody who's a *G.I. Joe* fan. I worked in the character design department, literally right next to Russ Heath, who was one of my boyhood heroes. He was a super-talented comic book artist who used to draw the *Sgt. Rock* comics, among other things. Russ is a great guy, and anything I say is not meant to disparage him, but his designs were not really animation friendly. They were very, very realistic—very subtle, very detailed. Looking at the shots that came back, I'd look at 'em and say, A) It doesn't look anything like Russ' design and, B) if you've only got so much to spend on makin' a cartoon, don't ask the guys overseas to be drawing every little button and chain link on all of the characters—that's a waste of time. The producers would always be coming back to my stuff and saying, "This is too simple—too cartoony. You gotta make it more detailed." Hey, that's what the toy company wanted. They wanted all the details of the toy—they wanted them in the cartoon. And I'd always fight against it, thinking it's not gonna animate well. But, whatever, I was gettin' paid to do what they wanted me to do.

What about *He-Man*?
[laughs continuously] *He-Man*? Well, *He-Man* was a job. What can I say?

But then there was *Tiny Toons*. There's a comic out there about Harley Quinn's origin, and in the background of one of the panels are Buster and Babs hanging on a noose. Is that your form of revenge?
It was just a stupid little in-joke. The previous two years, I'd been working for John—I worked with him on *Mighty Mouse,* and the year after that we worked on *Beany & Cecil* which was kind of the anti-*Mighty Mouse*. Everything that went right on *Mighty Mouse* went wrong on *Beany & Cecil*. And mostly it was do to corporate politics. It was a really messy situation, so none of us had much fun. So, on the basis of that, I'd had it with animation and got out of the business for almost a year. I tried to make money coloring comics, but it just wasn't working—I wasn't making enough money, it was a chore. So when *Tiny Toons* started up, a lot of the ex-*Beany & Cecil* and *Mighty Mouse* guys were workin' on *Tiny Toons*. They said, "Oh yeah, why don't you come over? They're doin' new Warner Bros. style cartoons." I said, "Okay, that might be kinda fun." Again, it started off to me as a job. I thought, I'm never gonna care about a show as much as I did on *Mighty Mouse*, so I'll just go in there and do my work, collect my paycheck and go home. That was the attitude I had when I first started on *Tiny Toons*. But there was fun along the way, too. We couldn't push the envelope as much as we did workin' for John, but it was still a whole lot more freedom than we had in the *He-Man* and *G.I. Joe* days.

How have you seen the climate of the animation market change since you began? It seems like the motion-picture side of the brush has gone through some rough times. Has it been the same for TV?
Well, it's all connected. The whole renaissance of animation—a lot of people point to it and it's pretty true—was pretty much brought about because of *Roger Rabbit*'s huge success. Because the Disney movies at the time were struggling and getting weaker and weaker and *Roger Rabbit* came out and said, "Oh yeah, cartoons are cool. We've forgotten how cool cartoons could be." Right about the same time, John was doing his stuff on *Mighty Mouse* and gained a little notoriety for that. And a year or two later, *The Little Mermaid* came out and everybody went, "Wow, even old-fashioned Disney style cartoons can be cool." It all snowballed at the same time.

Okay, I'm going to back you into a corner. What's your favorite episode of *Batman*?
That's impossible. Because since it's the 10-year anniversary of *Batman*, I've been getting a lot of requests for people saying, "What's your 10 favorite episodes?" I can't even narrow it down to 10. There's so many that I think are terrific. There's so many that I think are garbage now, too. When I go back and look at even episodes that I used to love, I look at them now and think, "Oh, geez, what was I thinkin'?"

What about *Superfriends*?
To be honest with you, I don't think I've ever sat through an entire episode of *Superfriends*. Even back in the day, I couldn't bare to watch what they'd done to the DC Comics characters. It was back in those days that there was such a dearth of superhero shows on TV, that you'd pretty much watch anything that was remotely superhero related, like I used to watch *The Six-Million Dollar Man*. But with *Superfriends*, I'd turn it on and go, "Oh my god, I can't watch this."

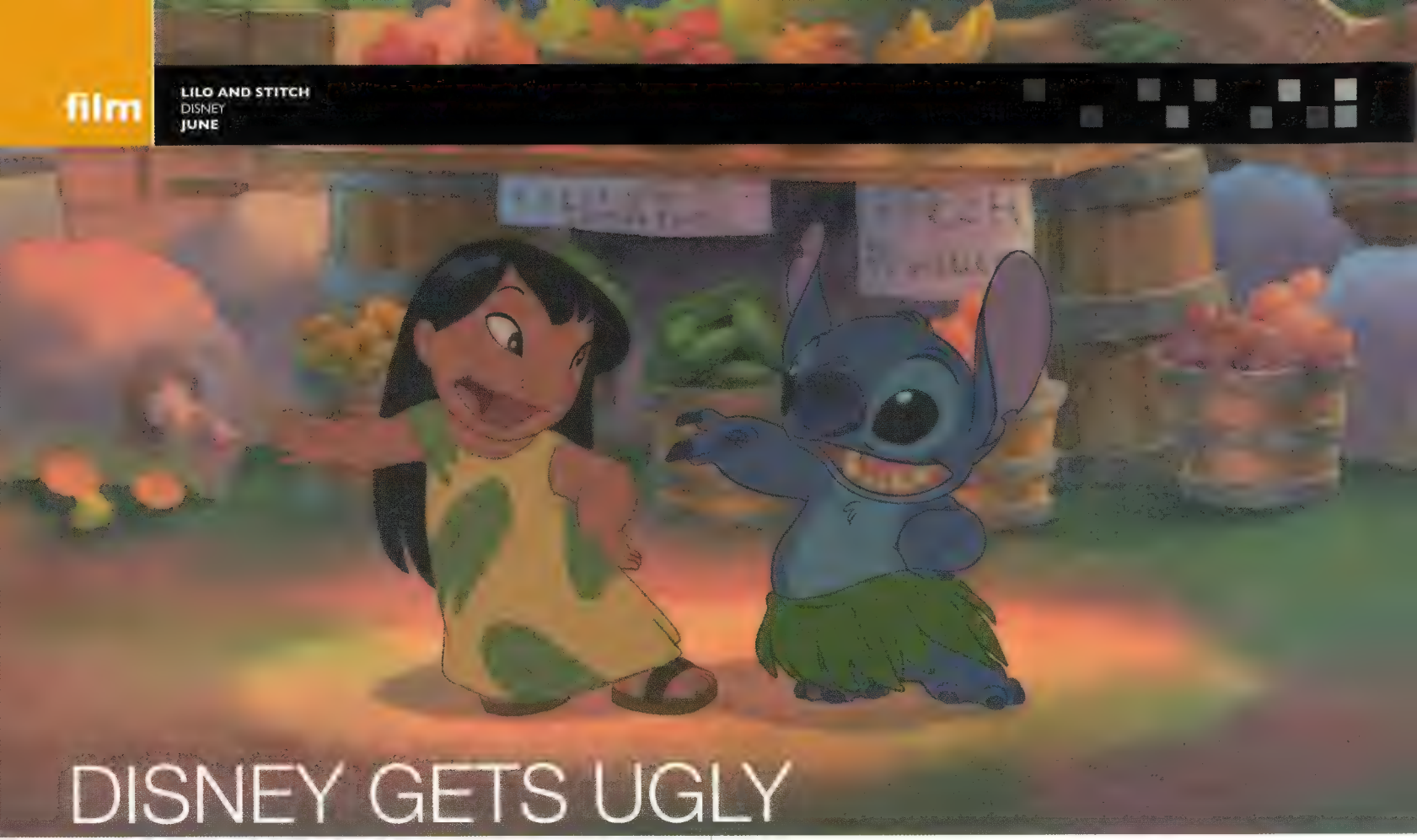
IDOL CHATTER
'WEIRD AL' YANKOVIC

1989 was a year of blockbuster movies. *UHF* wasn't one of them. But it did set the precedent as "The Funniest Movie You Haven't Seen." Maybe its presence was clouded by the likes of *Batman*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and *Lethal Weapon 2*; or maybe, just maybe, the voice of 'Weird Al' Yankovic was more synonymous with "Eat it" than free-spirited, feature-length belly laughs. Either way, *UHF* will be resurrected this month on DVD for the Farrelly Brothers generation to embrace. But first, Al answers some awfully tough questions...

as told to jon m gibson

In one word, *UHF* is... splendiferous.
In two words, *UHF* is... really splendiferous.
But the movie's box office was attributed to... the number of people that purchased tickets to screenings, which was a lower number than we would have liked.
Regardless, it needs to be seen because... of the fine work of negative cutter Gary Burritt.
If Dubya were to give a testimonial about the movie, if might go something like... "If you don't rush out right now and buy a copy of *UHF*, the terrorists have already won."
Drinking from the fire hose is... mandatory in certain third-world countries.
Not knowing the Dewey decimal system can... lower your sperm count.
If my name was Odd Al or Strange Al, my career would... probably follow the same sad trajectory as Strange Bob.
Polka is so... ultra, cutting-edge hip right now.
Eating food... is my favorite way to get food into my body.
Talking about food... is a sure sign of insanity.
Singing about food... bought me my first house.
The Spatula City in Minneapolis shut its doors because... there was probably a draft or something.
Michael Jackson... is a famous pop star that sold millions of albums and became friends with Emmanuel Lewis.
Dr. Demento... is the disc jockey that discovered me when I was just a wee lad.
Barbara Streisand... is the only real mother I've ever known.
Parodies... are the new black.
Coked-up movie stars... make bad house pets.
Stuffed animals that talk... still haunt me to this day.
An active imagination can be dangerous when... you're flying a jumbo jet and you think that bats are attacking your face.
People that talk to you in line at the grocery store... never want a real commitment.
Turn signals were meant to... subliminally implant the urge to kill.
Animals tend to get diarrhea most often after... eating at Denny's.
Computer generated images could make... a nice housewarming present.
Taking George Lucas' lead, Stanley Spadowski will "fire first" in the *UHF: Special Edition* rather than... Abe Vigoda.
***UHF 2* will be released**... September 13, 2007.
And the trilogy will be completed... May 31, 2013.
Being the funniest Al in the universe is tough... when Al Roker is always nipping at your heels.
In two words, *UHF* is... hardly describable.
In one word, *UHF* is... indescribable.

LILO AND STITCH
DISNEY
JUNE



DISNEY GETS UGLY

With 'Lilo and Stitch,' Disney is breaking all the rules. Everything that you'd expect from the studio has been twisted, warped, stepped on and flushed down the toilet.

as told to jon m gibson

***Lilo and Stitch* is out to prove that Disney isn't all soft and cuddly inside. In fact, when push comes to shove, the studio legendary for the G-rating can actually get a tad crude. Take this PG-rated cartoon—a deceptively cute but overall manic defiance of The House of Mouse—as a prime example. The film's two leads work completely against convention: Lilo is a girl plagued with social retardation, playing with voodoo like a toy; and Stitch is an intergalactic fugitive programmed for destruction that crash-lands in Hawaii. So now that we've got your attention, writer/directors Chris Sanders and Dean Deblois guide us through the process of taking everything that Disney stands for and turning it upside down.**

Have the Disney execs gone completely nuts? This movie ain't *The Care Bears*.
Chris: [laughs] You're absolutely right. This is a big departure for us. Dean and I had worked on some movies and when we got a chance to direct and write one, we wanted to make a big departure from a very successful formula—but a formula nonetheless. So we started this movie where [Disney] movies usually end, which is with the capture of a villain. Our idea was to take that villain and make him become the hero. So this is a redemption story, first and foremost. Stitch himself is very unique, because he started as a villain and then we did some heavy re-writing on him and now he's something that's completely unique. He is this genetic modification—a genetic creation—so not only is he hyper intelligent and incredibly capable and knowledgeable, but he's also kind of a baby. So he's this great mixture of irresponsibility and naivete—he's very naïve, but he's also very dangerous and skilled.
Dean: And Lilo has a lot of the same qualities. She's this six-year-old girl and has little girl ways about her, but she also has really deep insights. She's very up on Hawaiian legend and folklore; she has a really poignant way of looking at things, especially when it comes to issues of family and where you belong. For a little girl who's going through a lot tough stuff—with her parents recently deceased in a car crash and her older sister trying to retain custody of her—she manages to hold onto the ideals of family stronger than anyone in the film, and that's what she teaches Stitch eventually.
Chris: When we started this film, our goal was to break away from every convention that people think of in a Disney film. And any point at which we ran into something that we felt was familiar, we made sure we were very different—we changed that thing. But the interesting thing is, through this journey—after we got away from all those things—we found that we actually returned to what we feel the essence of a Disney animated film really is.
Dean: There is a lot of new stuff being explored in this movie, but what we really set out to do was recapture what movies like *Bambi* and *Dumbo* did for us when we first saw them—so there's definitely a nostalgia to them as well. Those films really took the time for character development and very honest, sincere character moments.
Chris: And to return to gustier storytelling. I think this film is super friendly on the outside, and the character designs are really adorable. But, like *Bambi*, although it's very cute looking, it has an inner working and has a story that's very bright.

Stitch is a fugitive, right? What did he get pulled over for?
Chris: [laughs] He's not really being sought for any crime in specific. As the first genetically created creature that this universe has ever encountered, they're pretty much frightened of him. His potential is extreme. He was built and designed to be a monster. He exists to destroy. He is so smart, so strong and so capable, that even transporting him didn't really work out. He got out of the ship immediately, stole a police cruiser and vanished.

This obviously isn't *Bambi* and *Dumbo* on the surface level, though. Were the suits at Disney actually receptive to that, or was it a tough sell?
Dean: In the beginning, Chris had created a booklet that was an outline of the story in its original form, so those got passed around to all the executives. So immediately, people were won over by the charm of the story, and the illustrations and characters. I think there was also the sense that, if we make this, it's an untested commodity. Because of that, they weren't going to give it a top budget, a lengthy production schedule and a huge crew. We made the film under those guidelines: "You guys are getting a little less of everything in trade for the risk of this story." We happily took that. Because we'd rather cut out things like tones and shadows and go for something that's more pure on-screen, with the liberty of having a story that is completely what we wanted to get onscreen with no compromise.
Chris: We just finished working on *Mulan*, which in the world of animation, the opportunity to finesse things is all too available. *Mulan*, I would say, is a near-perfect film. If you freeze any frame of that film, it's going to look incredible. We had spent—oh boy—around four years

working on the story. And after four years, you're not as fresh, shall we say, as you could be. [laughs] We longed to return to more of a *Beauty and the Beast* schedule, which was much more like two years. And that's about the ideal time frame for an animated movie. So that's one of the things that we were happy about, moving a little quicker on this film.

Even the voice actors are much more low-key than most Disney flicks. Ving Rhames, Tia Carrere, and Jason Scott Lee are hardly on the same level as Robin Williams.
Dean: I know it's a big celebrity draw to have these big names, and it brings people into the theater, but it's always been a pet peeve of mine. I don't want to work on creating a character for three years, walk into the theater and have half the theater going, "Oh, that's Robin Williams or Eddie Murphy!" I just really felt with this film, because it was a departure and a bit of a risk, it was more like, "What voice is most appropriate for this character, who can pull off the performance and who feels best-suited for the drawing?"
Chris: What we let everyone know from the very beginning, is that, "Don't expect this to be a fun film as far as being light-hearted all the time. It's going to lapse into some very serious moments." And all the voice actors we got were really keen on that.
Dean: The other thing is the two main characters—a six-year-old girl and an alien—we didn't have any big celebrity ideas for that. There aren't that many popular six-year-old girls out there.
Chris: They're always turning seven! [laughs]
Dean: I think we listened to over 100 girls, and we finally found the perfect voice for Lilo because she just got the darkness of the character and the quirks. And as far as Stitch, he was never meant to speak. He was just going to jibber and dabble in baby nonsense. Chris always does little voices around the studio, so whenever he was pitching the boards, he would always just assign this voice to Stitch. And it seemed to fit better than anything we could conceive in a big, celebrity Hollywood name, so as an experiment we just went with it.

So do Stitch for me.
Chris: [opting for a rabies-infested dog sound] Ugga-ugga-ba! Errrrr. Hugga-ugga-ba! Grrrrr. Arrrr. Arrrr.
Dean: There's a lot of gurgling.

See, that's one of the reasons why I wanted to do a story on *Lilo and Stitch*—it's so excitingly different. There's one scene in particular we're Lilo's actually doing voodoo.
Dean: They're spoons that she has very primitively decorated to look like her classmates, and so she's performing a voodoo thing on them. She locks them into a pickle jar, swishes them around in the brine, and then she says, "My friends need to be punished." Yeah, she's practicing voodoo while the social worker's in the house doing an inspection.
Chris: As a departure, there is no hero or villain in this film. It's all characters that are a mixture of good and bad. And that's a great moment to bring that out in Lilo, in that she's a really loving, wonderful little girl, but she's also fascinated with the dark side of things. She's got a real dark side to her personality. The idea that she's fascinated by voodoo and mummies, kind of preoccupied with dark things, as well as unconditionally loving this "ugly dog."
Dean: She also sees herself in as a key factor in the workings in the universe. Part of her routine is that she feeds a particular fish that swims out in the reef peanut butter sandwiches every Thursday. That's what will guarantee good weather for the week. So her doing voodoo is just her responsibility to correct her friends and their treatment of her. [laughs] **play**

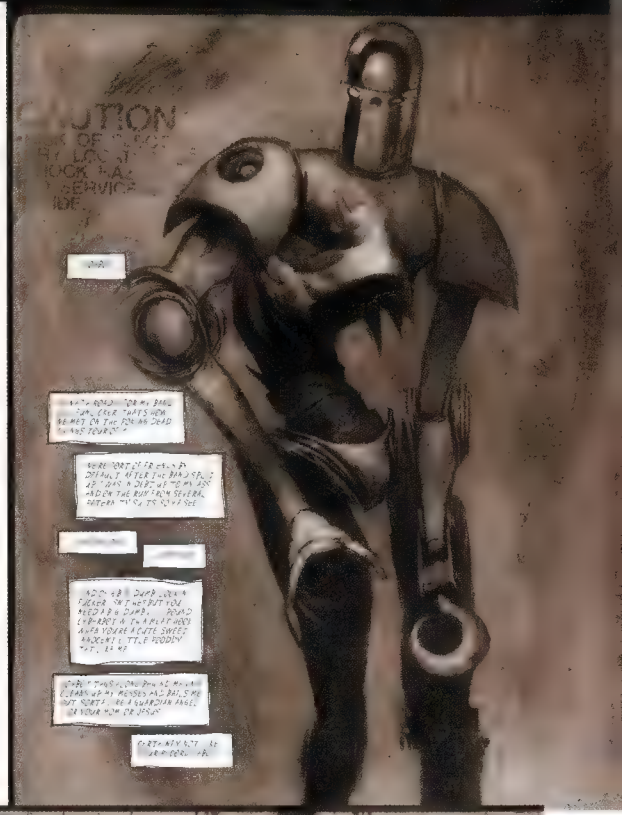
"...OUR GOAL WAS TO BREAK AWAY FROM EVERY CONVENTION..."

WARNING: ADULT CONTENT

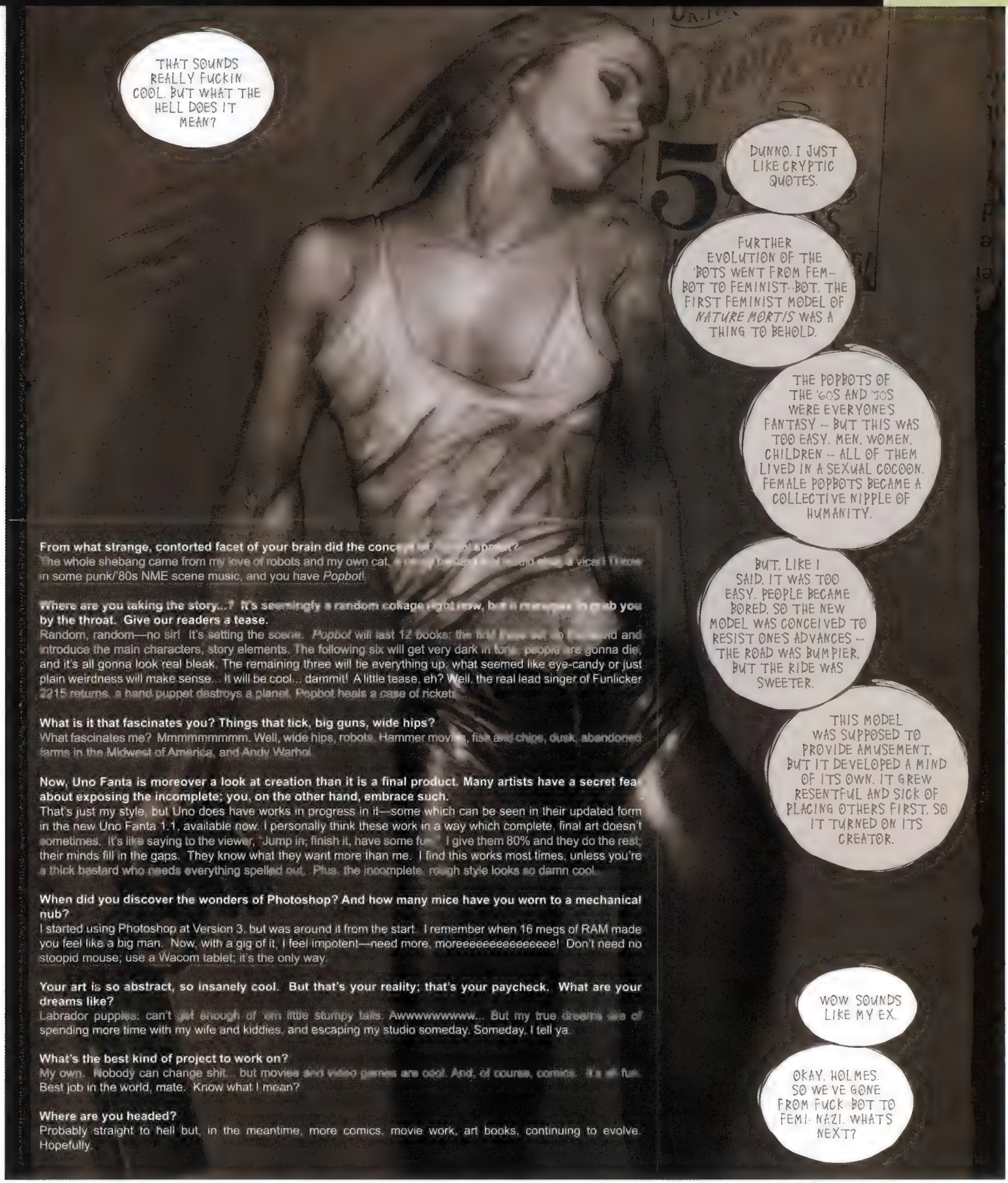
Artist/Writer Ashley Wood is pushing boundaries of the artistic kind, especially with his latest comic book fare, Popbot. Find out why.

interview jon m gibson

He's an Aussie, so maybe he got his insane visual wit from down under. But it's probably rooted deeper, wrapped around some dark corner of his brain where the demons hide. Either way, Ashley Wood has made his mark on the city of comics several times over. His creations for McFarlane Productions overflow with attitude—but those aren't even 100% Wood. Browsing *Uno Fanta* and the upcoming *Dos Fanta*—two extremely volatile picture books—he tours admirers through his crib of creation. Then, dipping into a more story-driven mold, Wood unveils the characters of his pet mini-series *Popbot: Kitty*, a cat who's also the lead singer of the band 2215 Funlicker; and Popbot, a 600-pound mechanized roadie with a meat hook for a left hand (who happens to be best friends with the lowly feline). Sam Keith, the narrative wizard behind the fervent fantasyland of *The Maxx*, helped to spin the script, only adding to the magnitude of coolness. So for curiosity's sake, we cracked open his skull to take a peek around. The gruesome, oddly shaped bits follow:



THESE NEW CYBERNETICALLY ENHANCED HUMANITY LEGGED IT OFFWORLD AND FORMED THE BIGGEST SKIPTRACER/PRIVATE DICK CORPS EVER SEEN. THEY BASICALLY BECAME MERCENARIES – DEADLY, FUCKED UP AND STALKING THEIR PREY IN BIKINIS WITH STILETTO HEELS AND SEVEN-INCH MAGNUMS.
DUDE! YOU'RE GIVING ME A BONE! BUT LIKE WHAT'S ALL THIS GOT TO DO WITH ME?
THIS IS THE ORIGINAL OF YOUR EVIL DOMESTICATED FRIEND HERE HAVE EVOLVED INTO A NASTY, NAKED VERSION WHICH IS OUT GUNNING FOR YOU
THAT'S RIGHT – TRY YOUR FUZZY BRASS KNUCKLES ON THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD YOU ABERRATION. YOU KNOW THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL IN ONE OF YOUR DRUNKEN SPREES
DO YOU REMEMBER SOMEONE NAMED MONICA?


THAT SOUNDS REALLY FUCKIN COOL. BUT WHAT THE HELL DOES IT MEAN?
DUNNO. I JUST LIKE CRYPTIC QUOTES.
FURTHER EVOLUTION OF THE 'BOTS WENT FROM FEM-BOT TO FEMINIST-BOT. THE FIRST FEMINIST MODEL OF *NATURE MORTIS* WAS A THING TO BEHOLD.
THE POPBOTS OF THE '60S AND '70S WERE EVERYONE'S FANTASY – BUT THIS WAS TOO EASY. MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN – ALL OF THEM LIVED IN A SEXUAL COCOON. FEMALE POPBOTS BECAME A COLLECTIVE NIPPLE OF HUMANITY.
BUT, LIKE I SAID, IT WAS TOO EASY. PEOPLE BECAME BORED. SO THE NEW MODEL WAS CONCEIVED TO RESIST ONE'S ADVANCES – THE ROAD WAS BUMPIER, BUT THE RIDE WAS SWEETER.
THIS MODEL WAS SUPPOSED TO PROVIDE AMUSEMENT, BUT IT DEVELOPED A MIND OF ITS OWN. IT GREW RESENTFUL AND SICK OF PLACING OTHERS FIRST. SO IT TURNED ON ITS CREATOR.
WOW SOUNDS LIKE MY EX.
OKAY, HOLMES. SO WE'VE GONE FROM FUCK BOT TO FEMI-NAZI. WHAT'S NEXT?

From what strange, contorted facet of your brain did the conc[illegible] *Popbot*?
The whole shebang came from my love of robots and my own cat. [illegible] in some punk/'80s NME scene music, and you have *Popbot*!

Where are you taking the story...? It's seemingly a random collage right now, but [illegible] by the throat. Give our readers a tease.
Random, random—no sir! It's setting the scene. *Popbot* will last 12 books: the first [illegible] and introduce the main characters, story elements. The following six will get very dark in tone, people are gonna die, and it's all gonna look real bleak. The remaining three will tie everything up: what seemed like eye-candy or just plain weirdness will make sense... It will be cool... dammit! A little tease, eh? Well, the real lead singer of Funlicker 2215 returns, a hand puppet destroys a planet, Popbot heals a case of rickets.

What is it that fascinates you? Things that tick, big guns, wide hips?
What fascinates me? Mmmmmmmmm. Well, wide hips, robots, Hammer movies, fish and chips, dusk, abandoned farms in the Midwest of America, and Andy Warhol.

Now, Uno Fanta is moreover a look at creation than it is a final product. Many artists have a secret fea[illegible] about exposing the incomplete; you, on the other hand, embrace such.
That's just my style, but Uno does have works in progress in it—some which can be seen in their updated form in the new Uno Fanta 1.1, available now. I personally think these work in a way which complete, final art doesn't sometimes. It's like saying to the viewer, "Jump in, finish it, have some fu[illegible] I give them 80% and they do the rest; their minds fill in the gaps. They know what they want more than me. I find this works most times, unless you're a thick bastard who needs everything spelled out. Plus, the incomplete rough style looks so damn cool.

When did you discover the wonders of Photoshop? And how many mice have you worn to a mechanical nub?
I started using Photoshop at Version 3, but was around it from the start. I remember when 16 megs of RAM made you feel like a big man. Now, with a gig of it, I feel impotent—need more, moreeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Don't need no stoopid mouse; use a Wacom tablet; it's the only way.

Your art is so abstract, so insanely cool. But that's your reality; that's your paycheck. What are your dreams like?
Labrador puppies; can't get enough of 'em little stumpy tails. Awwwwwwwww... But my true dreams are of spending more time with my wife and kiddies, and escaping my studio someday. Someday, I tell ya.

What's the best kind of project to work on?
My own. Nobody can change shit... but movies and video games are cool. And, of course, comics. It's all fun. Best job in the world, mate. Know what I mean?

Where are you headed?
Probably straight to hell but, in the meantime, more comics, movie work, art books, continuing to evolve. Hopefully.

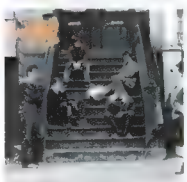
GHOST ROCK

With the release of their latest album, 'The Guest,' Phantom Planet aren't revolutionizing the rock scene—they're just five guys who want to play good rock 'n' roll

When lead singer Alex Greenwald picked up the phone, he didn't seem like the type of guy who normally enjoys doing press. Sure, with his band Phantom Planet's second album, *The Guest*, just released in record stores, he's probably been on his cell at least once a day answering the same generic journalistic Q&A. It's all in an effort to spread the word and hopefully incite sales—it must be done. But all Greenwald really wants to do is get on stage and barrel out a few songs. We'll let him explain why:

as told to jonah gibson

Record Label: Epic
Latest Album: The Guest



So what is it about California that makes you sing?
The abundance of microphones and air-brushed sunsets.

Tell me about food consumption. Pizza and burgers contribute to your creativity?
Yeah, I still can't quite figure it out, but for some reason you waste a lot of energy creating somehow. So we ordered a lot of food. I guess we still order a lot of food. We've been blessed with very high metabolism.

Did Cheetos make the junk list?
No, I'm not a big fan of animal products or cheese. I'm lactose intolerant—we've got two lactose intolerant people in the band.

That's not very pleasant. So aside from food, what was recording *The Guest* like?
The process can go many different ways. A good comparison would be when we recorded our first record, before *The Guest*. Look at it this way: You can be a band playing in a very sterile environment and trying to be perfect. And for the new record, the producers knew what they were doing. They had us on a schedule of about seven-hour days. We did it really quickly. Because rock and roll is all about having fun and not trying to be perfect. The excitement comes out of... in a lot of the songs, especially drums and guitar, it's recorded live—no over dubs. We dressed our studio up with a lot of trinkets to feel more comfortable. We had palm trees hanging from the ceiling, a mirror ball, fish all over the floor. I guess the trick is to be comfortable.

By raiding a party store?
We did. We got tons of stuff. Cuz you go into a recording room and it's usually just large, flat wooden panels and wood floors and track lighting. It's really bare-boned. I don't want to overuse the "sterile" word—it's pretty bleak and blank. It's a canvas to paint on—that's the way it should be—otherwise it's like playing in the doctor's office, and where's the fun in that?

You're more prone to live music then?
Yeah, they're two different sides totally. Okay, here's a good example: A studio is sort of like making a movie, although you've written the script, and you're the director and actor; whereas playing live is like a theater play, where there's a danger of people forgetting their lines—their guitar lines—and you can have more fun with it. There's more excitement.

Any recent on-stage antics that added to that energy?
We had a show in Minneapolis where, I don't know how exactly it happened, but I jabbed my thumb into a screw at the end of my bridge piece on my guitar and it just sort of popped a huge hole in my finger and it was spraying blood

"...I TOOK MY GUITAR OFF, SMEARED THE BLOOD OVER MY FACE AND JUMPED INTO THE AUDIENCE."

-alex greenwald, lead vocal phantom planet

everywhere. And it was toward our last song, so I just took my guitar off—because I was in a lot of pain—smeared the blood over my face and jumped into the audience. I guess, somehow, I got hold of the lighting fixture above the bar and pulled myself up and sang the rest of our last song hanging upside down from the chandelier.

I wasn't expecting to hear that. More like, "Yeah, this guy wandered on stage..."
Yeah, that's on a boring night. [laughs]

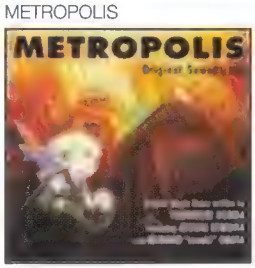
We've got to talk about your album now. It confuses me. First you're happy to be driving on the 405 and next it's a "Lonely Day." Who's been toying with your emotions?
Being a teenager and in our early twenties when we wrote these songs, we were run through the emotional gamut. California is sort of about getting back home and not being really happy about being back. All the things that I thought might be comforting at home actually end up driving me nuts. It's just telling it like it is. The diary of this record, I guess, is different goods and different bads [laughing while adopting a childish voice] different happys and different sads.

And you guys are still a young band: Any chance your egos will take over like Gene Simmons' did?
Sure, there's a possibility for anything. I'm planning on saving up for a Zepplin or a Goodyear Blimp or something that I can put my face over and become a fascist dictator. We'll see. I want to take over America. Small dreams. I'll start small. America first, the world later.

Small dreams? You best start with Canada.
No, that's pretty small. **play**

music reviews

METROPOLIS



TOSHIYUKI HONDA

Metropolis the anime soars. Metropolis the music lazily sails. Without the urgency and beauty of the film's visionary backdrop to lift the notes, this collection plays with a somber distance. Until you hit the third section, which introduces the more melodic moments with warmth and compositional strength. A peculiarly effective mix of jazz flows through the film, belling what we see, and on the album it emits a pleasant pull stuck between the orchestrated stretches.

SCORPION KING

VARIOUS

It's pleasing to know all these bands can still be upset and miserable while coming together, as one, to cash in on a fat summer-flick album. A collection like this always seems to sputter from its disparate mishmash, but strong new efforts by Godsmack and Disturbed (Korn's Davies gets writing credit) are a couple of the heavy names that lead a strong stock across the board. POD take a little edge off the incendiary "Rise," System of the Down melodically spaz with an original, Creed squeeze out a blemish in the middle, fed by a few banalities of no-names and know-betters, but as a whole the *Scorpion King* rocks with the throwaway energy of the movie.

SPIDER-MAN

VARIOUS

Hey, how'd those two cool Danny Elfman tracks sneak onto this deflated pancake? Can one album truly carry so much innocuous rock-pop without glowing like spidey juice? Why is there a decent Pete Yorn song on this thing? Can even Jerry Cantrel slide into this mire—willingly, by adding to it with a slick sing-along number? Aerosmith mauling the theme of Spider-Man? Alien Ant Farm straining to be the next Beasty Boys? All these questions are yours on *Spider-Man, Music from and inspired by.*" And one more question: music "inspired by" the motion picture?

PATENTED AIR FLO TECHNOLOGY
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The birth of the modern control pad came with the introduction of the NES (Nintendo Entertainment System) back in 1985. Since, significant advancements include the introduction of shoulder buttons in '91 with the SNES (Super Nintendo Entertainment System), the six-button configuration developed to support the fighting craze started by Street Fighter and, most recently, pressure-sensitive buttons and, of course, analog, which has changed everything. So it would seem that until we can control games with our minds—"jump you little freak!"—the modern controller has pretty much reached the top of its evolutionary chain. Attempts at gimmicks like the U-Force (don't ask) and arm-mounted gizmos that look like you took a fall in the half pipe have gone nowhere fast. So what could possibly improve today's design beyond current standards?

Enter Air Flo, Nyko's latest and greatest control pad patent that, as the name implies, bathes the player's hands with a cushion of air as you play. Sounds like a gimmick, you say? Well, I must admit, I initially thought the same. But when Nyko swung by the office and put one in my hands (which admittedly tend to get a little moist in the odd circumstance I'm actually challenged), well, we put a controller on the cover. Need I say more? The Air Flo pads are seriously developed concepts. The fans, which run quietly off the system's power, not only help keep your hands dry, but just feel really cool in general—like you're getting the royal treatment while you play. I can't see anyone looking for an after-market controller reaching for anything but Air Flo, especially since the price ($29.99) doesn't reflect the technology. I'm especially fond of the Xbox pad, which is a great pad in its own right, due to the unique design. While the Gamecube and PS2 pads are from pretty standard molds, the Xbox controller has a unique smallish design that feels great in your hands. All three pads are quality controllers, with attention paid to analog tension and button responsiveness.

Nyko has outthought and outmaneuvered their competition on this one and, as a result, have made a substantial contribution to control pad design in the process. So the next time you shop for a new pad, remember: the one that blows is the only name you need to know.

gear

PELICAN LIGHT

$TBA www.pelicanacc.com

In their never-ending quest to develop light attachments for the Game Boy Advance that actually work, Pelican has managed to improve upon their Light Shield with a new light/magnifier combo, which we'd gladly provide you the name of had we not tossed the packaging. The new device (now the GBA add-on to beat) features a dimmer switch and a new auto setting, which toggles the light on and off, in sync with how light/dark the screen is. It also compresses and unfolds with hydraulic-like action. We're not wild about the auto feature, but otherwise this is the best thing next to a backlit GBA.

SONY CLIE, MICRO MV HANDYCAM

Things shrink, things get better. Such is the march of technological progress, as evidenced by two of Sony's latest products. First is the Swiss Army knife of PDAs, Sony's PEG-NR70V. Running the Palm OS, this thing boasts a digital camera, MP3 playback, and a mini keyboard for text entry. Next is Sony's IP7BT Handycam. Utilizing a new digital tape format even smaller than MiniDV called MicroMV, this is the smallest digital camera ever made. If this weren't enough, it even supports the wireless Bluetooth protocol, which allows you to check e-mail and perform other online tasks through its LCD viewfinder. Amazing.

SONY PEG-NR70V

SONY IP7BT MICRO MV DIGITAL VIDEO CAMERA

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gear

SCIENCE TECH VECTRON BLACKHAWK

$99 science tech

Fancy your own personal U.F.O? Then try Science Tech's Vectron Blackhawk, a remote-controlled spinning disc that you can fly around the room. Using a combination of three tiny rotors and a large, rotating outer ring, the Blackhawk can lift off and be maneuvered in all three axes by rather video game-y tethered control pad. Use auto mode to watch the thing hover, but for real fun, switch it to manual and crash the thing all over the place. It's light and simple, so it can take a few knocks, but you'll soon get the hang of it (it takes finesse), and can then enjoy a feeling of mastery over the object. A clever bit of strobe technology also allows you to write messages on the outer ring, though we could never think of anything more clever than obscenities. The only bummer is that the thing is tethered to the controller, but not to worry: Science Tech is coming up with a wireless one as we speak.

Flying the Vectron definitely takes some getting used to, but gamers should have no trouble with the very game-like controller.

INTEC PS2 SCREEN

$149 www.intec.com

Problem: You're traveling to a far away place and just can't live without your PS2 and porn, er, I mean, DVDs. Solution: Intec's five-inch LCD screen for the PS2. Not only does it snap tightly onto the PS2's deck where it conveniently flips up or down, it also boasts stereo speakers that actually sound good, a headphone jack, a crisp picture, and adjustable brightness and color. It's a surprisingly quality apparatus, given the price of $149.99. You're strapped by the included AC adaptor, so it's of no use unless you're in the vicinity of a standard outlet (or a Toyota Matrix), but so is your PS2.

Whether you have questions, criticisms—or if you just need to vent or say what's on your mind—write us here at **play**. It's time to get a major forum going…off-line. **Email your queries and concerns to:**

letters@play-magazine.com

LUCKY BASTARD

Different cover, but the content still blows me away. I hope you have some memory of me and my rants, we've had a few meaningful chats in the past. But one wee bit of advice: Get off the political and ideological crap. "Sending Xboxes to the middle east loaded with C4" is purely a childish remedy for a situation that your writers do not comprehend. Be a person with knowledge of the world, not someone filled with ignorance. Oh, I am finally an owner of all systems—PS2, Xbox, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, and a PC. I am one lucky bastard!

Take care,
Al Liu

Al,
Thanks, I think. We meant no disrespect to the Taliban in our comments on Xboxes loaded with C4... yeah right! Al, dude, lighten up. If we can't joke about those terrorist bastards, who can we joke about? Congrats on the systems, though… Ain't democracy grand!

THE CALLING

How many of you gamers out there are Christians???
Scott Whitmore

Scott,
12,133,611 at last count.

SEGA SAVVY

Good to see you guys helming another gaming mag. With your names in the publication I can always expect two things: quality and a lot of Sega coverage! From here on out, this will be the ONLY video game magazine I'll ever pick up again!

Now let's get down to some gaming talk; namely of the aforementioned Sega. I've liked Sega since I first planted my rear end on a hydraulic-actuated *Space Harrier* cabinet. I've been madly in love with Sega ever since I first picked up a Saturn controller with *Panzer Dragoon* running. I, too, share your sympathy and understanding of their decision to leave the console biz behind. Regurgitating the oft commented feeling among us Sega fans, now that they are platform agnostic, EVERYONE will now know of how great a game developer and publisher Sega is. Which brings me to my point (I do a lot of building up, don't I?). We all know how shamefully neglected the Saturn became in its twilight. Yet, some very cool games came out for it that only the very dedicated got the chance to play. Games like *Shining Force III*, *Burning Rangers*, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, *Last Bronx*, etc. Granted, a new *Panzer* game is slated for the Xbox, but those others deserve to be enjoyed by a larger audience as well. Could you imagine an update to *Last Bronx* on, say, the GameCube—look out *Soul Calibur*! Or a remake or sequel to *Burning Rangers* on the Xbox? Hell, the *Gunvalkyrie* engine would be perfect for it! Is there any chance of Sega moving in this direction? Or are they only looking forward, not backward; as was their mantra for the ill-fated (but still sorely missed) Dreamcast.

Dustin (AKA:Yuushi)

Dustin,
Funny you should mention it, because we're about to sit down with Peter Moore to discuss that very thing. It seems that Sega is indeed leaning in that direction and beginning to draw from their amazing stockpile. Besides the *Toe Jam and Earl*, *Shinobi*, and *Panzer* sequels, which will all debut at this year's E3, THQ are beginning to port Genesis games to Game Boy Advance as well. I think the jump to software giant has finally given Sega the sales potential to justify reaching into their bag of tricks. Besides the titles you've mentioned, imagine updates of *Altered Beast*, *Alex Kidd*, *Streets of Rage*, *OutRun*, *Golden Axe*, *AfterBurner*... we could go on and on. Sega seems more savvy than ever these days, so I wouldn't rule any of them out. On the subject of rare Saturn treasures: If you really want to get into it, find *Princess Crown*, *Steam Gear Mash*, *Keio Yu Gektai* (the sequel to *Mystic Defender*), and *Radiant Silvergun*. We have at least 30 great games here that never saw the light of day in the U.S. We'll never unplug our Saturns. Sega has provided us with some of our fondest gaming memories and seem ready to repeat the process.

STUPID GAMES

I must say that I really enjoy your guy's mag. It is very well put together and the topics that you guys write about appeal to a lot of readers... I believe that the average gamer can relate to the non-gaming articles, from anime to movies to music. I know other gaming mags have tried to venture off into other topics of discussion, but what separates **play** from the others is that if I go into any of the non-gaming related articles, I don't find myself reading about a dvd/movie review that's three months old. Basically, I feel that **play** is one of the best American gaming mags out there right now. I just had to get that out of my system, because I am very biased about domestic gaming mags. I tend to stick to the publications like *Famitsu* and *Famitsu PS2*... So, it's pretty rare of me to pick up a gaming mag written here in the states, let alone buy each issue that comes out... Of course, it may have to do with all of the big and pretty pictures in it—but hey, I'm not complaining. I've got all of your issues except issue 001, because that was a horrible selection for a cover... the reason I am bitter is because I shelled out 50 bucks for some dropout C++ student's class project called *State of Emergency*... stupid, stupid game... Enough of that. Keep up the good work and I'm looking forward to next months issue!!!

Best regards,
Dave Talag

Dave,
To be mentioned in the same breath as *Famitsu* is an honor—thank you. You're officially now in our good graces. You scared us there for a second! Our first issue had *Jak and Daxter* on the cover! So, you didn't dig *SoE*, huh? We received a mixed response on that one—people seem to either love it or hate it. If nothing else, we felt it made a bold statement, and that the subject matter deserved the spotlight. We certainly appreciate all of the input we receive either way. We'll certainly consider our readers' opinions should a similar circumstance present itself, which given the numbers *SoE* achieved, is likely. VIS are currently using the *SoE* engine for THQ's next *Evil Dead* game.

PLAY COUNTS

The *Malice* issue had a typo on the spine. Instead of having 004 for May, it has 005. [The May issue of] **play** was everything I hoped for with talk of the future of video gaming and anime like *Escaflowne* and the pure, uncensored imagery like *Berserk: War Cry*. **play** is in the zone.

Regal Sin

Regal,
They keep telling me why we skipped from 003 to 005, but I keep forgetting... Oh yeah! The month needs to correspond with the number. So it wasn't a typo—those were in the issue itself.

FORGOTTEN REALMS

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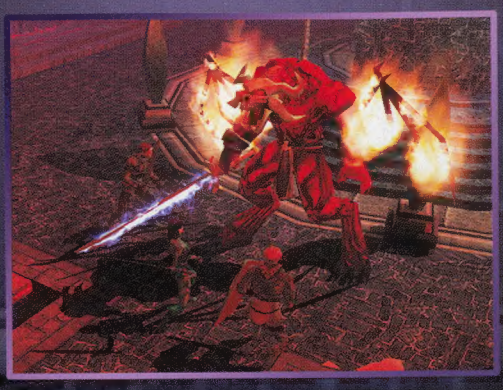

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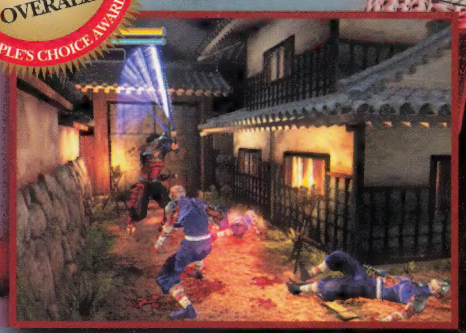

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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